

Because You Are Love (KarlNap)

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Because You Are Love (KarlNap)

by [Simplysmitten](#)

Summary

Sapnap grew up in Texas, a state where being gay just wasn't something you were allowed to talk about- so he didn't. He never came out to his family and even when he made new friends who loved him unconditionally, he still couldn't bring himself to come out. Staying in the closet never felt like a problem once he moved to Florida with Dream, well, until a video collaboration introduced him to a boy that made him question if he could keep

hiding. Now, Sapnap has to return to Texas for the first time since his move to Florida for his step-sister's birthday. What's waiting for him when he arrives is going to make keeping his sexuality a secret from his family that much harder.

Notes

Hi :) The title and chapters are based off of the minecraft end poem. I'm also uploading this onto wattpad if you want to see the cover art on each chapter or prefer the formatting better over there! Thank you for reading, I hope you enjoy <3 love you always

I see the player you mean

You know that feeling where you're just dreading something for absolutely no reason? Like, nothing bad ever happened regarding it, no negative experiences, nothing that would make you hate it so much- but you just do?

Yeah. That's exactly how Sapnap felt.

The unfortunate time where his family insisted he come back to Texas and visit had finally come back around. Since he moved to Florida with Dream about a year ago, his family has tried getting him to come and visit at least once a month. He's usually good at finding ways to get out of it- MCC, traveling to see friends or friends traveled to see him, Florida's unpredictable weather- *something*.

No excuse he could come up with would get him out of it this time. According to his dad and step-mom, there's nothing more important than his little sister's birthday. He knew he could send gifts, spend all day on facetime with her, even fly his whole family out to Florida and take them all to universal. None of those were real options though. He knew his family didn't truly need to be in Texas to celebrate her birthday, they just finally found a reason Sapnap couldn't get out of.

There was no specific reason why Sapnap hated Texas so much. He tried to embrace it when he was younger- hanging a flag on his wall, using a southern accent around certain people, going to shooting ranges with his dad, hell, he even spent one summer working on a farm. He tried everything he could to *feel* like he belonged there.

He made sure he never told the other guys in his grade that he loved anime and Pokémon, that he spent his free time trying to learn how to skateboard. He didn't tell them that he played video games online with friends he had made around the world. All the parts of himself that actually made him happy were what Sapnap hid from everyone in his real life.

Despite his efforts, none of it worked. Nothing could change the fact that you just can't be gay in Texas.

Sapnap never experienced homophobia, not directed *at* him at least, but he grew up surrounded by it. The slurs kids threw around the hallways at school like they were nothing. The fear you could see a mile away in a young boy's eyes when someone would accuse them of being gay, knowing that if you were called it once, there was nothing you could do to shake that title.

Sapnap always made sure he never got put in that position. He did all the Texan things, like he played on all the sports teams in high school and he made sure he always had a girlfriend. He knew that having a girlfriend would be a risk, seeing that they of all people would be able to tell something wasn't connecting. He just made sure to keep things strictly above the belt and broke up with them after a few months.

It kind of gave him the reputation of a player, but a player was better than people finding out who he really was.

Once Sapnap met Dream and all his other online friends, he finally found people he could connect with. People who didn't use gay as an insult or made him do things he didn't want to do in order to fit in. They were just people who loved and accepted him for exactly who he is.

Well, at least he's pretty sure they would. You see, Sapnap hadn't actually *told* any of them about

his sexuality. Whenever it came up in conversation, he lied and said he was straight. He would even talk about all the girls he dated in high school and college. Sapnap was 99% sure that none of his online friends- his *real* friends, would give him a hard time about being gay.

That 1% though. That 1% chance that *maybe* they would care, *maybe* they would harass him for it, *maybe* they would use their platforms to out him to the whole world. Even if it was just 1% that was based on his own fear and nothing his friends ever did, that risk was still too much for him.

It sounds dramatic, but it was honestly never really an issue. Sapnap felt comfort in knowing he had friends who were genuinely good people. He had no hesitation about finally moving out of Texas and to Florida when Dream asked him about getting a place together. He even dropped out of college early so he could move there sooner. Sapnap was also thankful that Dream was the one who asked to live together, since conversations about dating didn't come up too often between them. Sapnap knew Dream had his own not-so-great past with relationships, so he never pushed the topic.

Sapnap hiding who he is was never really an issue until one day, Dream begged him to join in on a video collaboration with Mr. Beast. One stupid video that introduced Sapnap to *him*.

Introduced him to a boy with a contagious laugh and full lips, who had wavy hair that whipped in all directions when he talked about something he enjoyed. A boy whose blue eyes felt like they weren't looking at a camera but looking directly at him. A boy who had the warmest smile he had ever seen. A boy who he knew would soon become a very important person in his life.

A beautiful boy named Karl Jacobs.

Sapnap?

Chapter Summary

Sapnap is dreading his quickly approaching trip to Texas

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Late April has always been a nostalgic time for Sapnap.

April was the month that pre-season for high school football started. Out of all the things Sapnap forced himself to participate in so he could fit in, football was his favorite. He was surprised to find himself genuinely enjoying the game and looking forward to each season.

April was also when spring *actually* started, causing wild Bluebonnets and Primroses to bloom all over the backroads. He loved flowers. Looking at them, smelling them, picking them. Flowers were just one of the simple joys in life that never failed to put a smile on his face.

April was also his younger step-sister, Marisol's, birth month. When Sapnap was her age, home meant yelling and doors being slammed. He was grateful that his dad was able to be more present with her than he was for him. Sapnap's heart felt full when he saw the way his dad connected with her, even if it did sting knowing that he and his brothers would never have that same connection with him. Sapnap always tried to brush off the feeling of jealousy whenever it arose.

Possibly Sapnap's favorite memory that took place in April was when he met up with Karl and played in Mr. Beast's extreme \$100,000 game of tag. Winning the game couldn't even compare to the joy Sapnap felt spending a whole week with Karl.

As Sapnap sat outside on his and Dream's back porch, fanning himself with a stray newspaper as he watched the sunset, he found his mind wandering back to Karl. It was unintentional most of the time, the way his mind could connect anything back to Karl.

When Sapnap would hear certain songs and be taken back to when he and Karl would sing together in the car. When he tried to cook and the smell of slightly burnt food filled the kitchen- if he closed his eyes, he could practically see Karl making an anxious face while holding up a wooden spoon in defense, hiding whatever he had burnt. When he laid in bed alone at night and he would hear Dream walking around the house, Sapnap felt like he was waiting for his door to swing open and for Karl to jump into his bed, telling a random story that definitely could've waited until morning.

"Sapnap?"

Sapnap opened his eyes, his faint smile fading as he turned to his right. Dream was staring down at him with a raised eyebrow and the hint of a smirk. Sapnap faced forward in his chair again, avoiding Dream's gaze as he made his way to sit in the chair next to him.

"Uh, what's up man? I thought you were on call with George." Sapnap finally responded, accepting the glass of ice water Dream had brought out for him.

"I was, but I let him go. What's up with you? What are you smiling about out here by yourself?"

Dream asked, taking the newspaper from Sapnap's hand to fan himself.

"Nothing in particular." Sapnap lied, painfully obviously too. Dream just shrugged in response, turning his attention to the last moments of the sunset as well. This was why Sapnap was glad Dream was the one he lived with. Any of their other friends would have pressed him about it further, asking what *girl* he had on his mind

"Do you *have* to go? I'm going to be so bored while you're gone." Dream changed the subject, groaning slightly as he swatted a few mosquitos with the newspaper.

"Trust me, I tried everything- I have to. It's just a week though, I'll be back before you can cause too much trouble on Twitter." Sapnap said with a slight laugh, resulting in an equal laugh in response from Dream.

"Come on, Twitter would be nothing without me." Dream scoffed, hitting Sapnap with the newspaper before fanning himself again. The two fell into a comfortable silence, watching as the sun dipped below the palm trees in the distance.

"Shit, it's passed 8, I have to-"

"Go call Karl. Yeah, yeah. Leaving me for Karl when you're already leaving me for Texas in a few hours." Dream finished Sapnap's sentence, waving his free hand to encourage Sapnap to go inside. Sapnap leaned over, ruffling Dream's overgrown hair before grabbing his drink and heading inside.

Sapnap pulled out his phone as soon as he closed the sliding glass door, dialing Karl while he walked through the living room.

"I thought you forgot about me. I was getting ready to mail out the divorce papers." Karl said, answering after the first ring.

"I could never forget about you, dork." Sapnap said with a smile growing ear to ear. He was thankful Karl couldn't see him while they were on these calls. His feelings were written all over his face whenever he heard Karl's voice.

Sapnap paced around the house while he and Karl talked. This had become a new routine for them. It started off as a way for Sapnap to help hold Karl accountable for all the work he had taken on lately. Sapnap was supposed to call at 8pm every night and essentially hang out with Karl to motivate him to do his work.

"Sap, do you love me?" Karl asked innocently, seemingly out of nowhere. Sapnap halted his pacing, finally noticing his surroundings. He had somehow wandered into one of the guest rooms with Patches standing by his feet. Sapnap swore she enjoyed his and Karl's calls just as much as they did, seeing that they gave her a buddy to walk with.

"Uh, why?" Sapnap deflected with a slight laugh. He knew Karl was just asking to lead into requesting a favor, but just hearing the question, thinking about their little routine of nightly calls- it was all a bit much. It all fed into this false narrative Sapnap had created in his mind. Nightly calls, flirtatious banter, saying 'I love you' so much it felt like a habit. In his mind, he and Karl were practically already together.

"Because if you *do*, then you should prove it by driving up to see me, like, right now. It's been forever since you visited and North Carolina is so dull without you." Karl continued with a light whine in his voice.

Sapnap could feel his heart rate increasing, bringing a hand up to feel the heat that had risen to his

cheeks. How could Karl say things like *that* when he only viewed Sapnap as a friend?

"I would love to, believe me. But I'm, uh, actually leaving for Texas in a couple hours." Sapnap said regretfully, knowing he would much rather spend his time driving to Karl instead of to the Midwest.

"Oh. I didn't know you were visiting home." Karl said, somewhat surprised. Sapnap felt a piece of his heart drop just hearing Texas referred to as 'home'. It didn't even feel like home when he did live there.

"Yeah, but it's only for a week. I can still call you every night and-"

"No! No, don't worry about that! You should spend time with your family." Karl insisted. Sapnap hesitated before responding. How could he tell Karl that these phone calls were the only thing getting him through the day sometimes- and that was without even being in Texas.

"I mean, if you don't mind, I'd still want to call. Honestly, I'm really not looking forward to visiting... home. I've kind of been putting it off for a while." Sapnap mumbled towards the end of his sentence, finally turning around and heading towards his own bedroom, Patches following close behind.

"Oh, I mean, of course you can. Um, can I ask why you've been putting it off?" Karl said after a moment of silence.

Sapnap sighed, falling into his bed. He shouldn't have said anything. How was he supposed to explain all the reasons he held a grudge against Texas without outing himself?

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading, love you always <3

I like this player

Chapter Summary

Sapnap opens up to Karl about why he doesn't want to go back to Texas.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Sap? Sorry, you don't have to talk about it if you don't want. I, uh, didn't mean to make you uncomfortable or anything like that. Forget I asked, really-"

"No, no! It's okay. Sorry, I just, I guess I can't tell if I don't know what to say or I don't know where to start." Sapnap interrupted. Even if it put him in a more difficult position, he just wanted to make sure that Karl knew he wasn't upset with him. That he could *never* be upset with him.

"Are you sure? I really don't want to pressure you if it's personal." Karl continued. Sapnap could hear the faint squeak of Karl's computer chair in the background. A smile was already beginning to form on Sapnap's face again, as he could perfectly picture Karl at that moment. He was sure Karl was wearing sweats and a crewneck, sitting with one leg tucked underneath him and the other on the ground, using it to sway himself back and forth in his desk chair.

"Yeah, it's fine. I guess I just never felt like I really, uh, belonged there? Not because of anything my family did, I guess. Just, in general, no matter how much I tried when I was a kid, I just *knew* that I wasn't supposed to be there. That I couldn't be *me* as long as I was in Texas." Sapnap stumbled through his explanation a few times, finally cutting himself off before he shared more than he wanted to.

"I'm sorry, Nick. I had no idea you felt-"

"Oh, don't go and '*Nick*' me now." Sapnap laughed. "Really, it's just a weird feeling I've always had. It's nothing to worry about, I promise." Sapnap continued. The last thing he wanted was Karl's pity. He also was just hoping to move on from the topic before Karl asked *why* he felt like he never belonged or what he meant when he said 'be *me*'.

"Hey, I'll *Nick* you whenever I want." Karl said with a small giggle. Sapnap also laughed a bit in response, looking across his room to his monitor. It had been a while since he streamed, at least a week or two.

"Since you're clearly not doing any work-"

"Hey!"

"How about we stream? I'd be down for like fortnite or valorant if you want. I'm sure Punz is probably already playing anyway." Sapnap pitched, laughing at Karl's denial.

"Don't stream, I don't want to have to share your attention with everyone else." Karl complained. And just like that, Sapnap was sucked in again. Sucked into the fantasy of what life would be like if he were honest with Karl about his sexuality, about the feelings he had had for him since the very first time they spoke. If he could be honest and tell Karl how not only does he bring out the

best in him, but he likes to think he brings out the best in Karl too.

Even if Sapnap did say all of that, come completely clean to Karl, it wouldn't even matter. Sapnap had found himself living out the cliché trope of being in love with his *straight* best friend.

"Needy." Sapnap scoffed. He had essentially mastered the art of being able to control his voice whenever he was talking to Karl. It was just his face that was the dead give away. Honestly, sometimes Sapnap wished Karl was just a *bit* more observant and noticed all the things he couldn't hide when they were together.

Things like how his eyes always wandered to Karl's lips when he spoke. Or how anytime Karl would wrap an arm around him, try to hold his hand, or even just lean against him, he would always look down in hopes the brim of his hat would cover his glowing cheeks. Or even how he would find any reason to be holding onto Karl, whether it be by his arm, his shoulder, even his waist- Sapnap always had to be touching him.

"Oh, I'm needy? Says the one who *accidentally* fell asleep in my bed, like, every night the last time you visited." Karl teased.

"It's not my fault you put the best TV in your bedroom. If you had it in the living room or guest room, then I'd be falling asleep there." Sapnap responded smugly, adjusting under the covers now that Karl had decided for him that he wouldn't be streaming. It would probably be for the best that he snuck in a few hours of sleep before he started his drive.

"Why would I do that? I just said it made you needy, not that I didn't like it. You're warm." Karl said casually. Rustling soon followed on Karl's end of the call, while Sapnap continued trying to get his heart rate under control.

Karl liked it. Karl liked that he was warm. Karl *liked* sharing a bed with him. It was times like this when Sapnap wanted to profess everything, to take the opportunity and run with it.

"Well, you were right about one thing though- I'm definitely not doing work anymore. I actually just crawled into bed." Karl continued, completely unbothered by Sapnap's silence.

"I'm in bed too." Sapnap said quietly, pulling a body pillow to his chest.

"You should be in my bed. I could use a heater." Karl said through a yawn. Heater was definitely an accurate way to describe Sapnap. His blushing cheeks were actually getting warm enough to the point that he had begun to fan his face with his hand.

"Yeah? I could use a human ice cube. It's been in the 90s all week here. It's like Florida skipped spring and went straight to summer." Sapnap sighed, rolling over to plug in his phone. He put Karl on speaker, moving back to spoon the body pillow he wished was Karl.

"I think I'm gonna pass out soon. Goodnight, love you." Karl said, yawning once again.

"Love you too, Karl. Night." Sapnap responded, closing his eyes once he heard the call disconnect.

"I love you." Sapnap mumbled to himself, pressing his face into the cool pillow he was hugging.

I hope you enjoyed the chapters! I'm trying to keep them brief (900-1,500 words) compared to Please Let Me Go (those went upwards of 7,000 words sometimes). Also, for those who aren't familiar with long road trips, it's really common to leave in the middle of the night (3-4am) if you're trying to get the trip done in one day. In Sapnap's case, he's planning to leave around 3am for his 14 hour drive, so he can be in Texas by that evening.

Deep in the dream of the game

Chapter Summary

After delaying his trip by a few hours, Sapnap gets ready to head out on the road

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Karl! Karl! Over here!" Sapnap called across the crowded airport, waving his hands in the air to catch Karl's attention.

"There you are!" Karl exclaimed, crashing into Sapnap. The two slapped each other's backs at first, but soon settled into the intimate hug. This was always Sapnap's favorite part- the first hug of a meet up. It could never be too long, it could never be too tight, he could cry or laugh or anything in between and Karl would wipe his tears or laugh along with him.

"Your plane landed like an hour ago, what took you so long?" Sapnap smiled up to Karl, instinctively reaching up to tidy Karl's hair from being pressed against his neck for so long.

"The plane was stuck on the runway for a while and then everyone was so rushed to get off, I just let them all go ahead of me." Karl sighed, tilting his head down so Sapnap could have a better angle at fixing his hair. It was such a small gesture, but it always made Sapnap feel special when he remembered that Karl didn't like it when anyone touched his hair but him.

"So what I'm hearing is you weren't rushing to see me because you hate me-" Sapnap cut himself off when Karl stood up straight and hit him in the arm, taking a step back as both of them began laughing.

"Come here, I'm not done hugging you yet." Sapnap said, pulling Karl in by his button up. Karl accepted the hug readily, wrapping his arms around Sapnap's shoulders once again. Sapnap wanted to stay in that moment forever. To have Karl wrapped around him, to smell his cologne, to have Karl's overgrown hair tickle his neck when he continually adjusted his head- all of it.

After another minute of hugging and their laughter finally dying down, Karl started to pull away. Sapnap looked up, surprised to find Karl's face only an inch away from his own, Karl's hands still resting on Sapnap's shoulders.

"Are you g-"

"I missed you." Karl said softly, not allowing for any space to grow between them. Sapnap was beginning to panic- he had no way to hide. He couldn't look down, he couldn't adjust his hat, he couldn't even stop himself from looking at Karl's lips, which were just below his eye level.

"Yeah, I, um, missed you... too." Sapnap said slowly, eventually just closing his eyes to stop himself from doing something he knew he would regret.

"Can I kiss you?" Karl asked with a smile evident in his words. Sapnap opened his eyes, staring up to Karl in silence. Did he really just ask that?

"Why would you- you want to- what?" Sapnap stumbled over his words, failing to even finish a sentence. Karl didn't seem to mind, his smile still faintly on his lips. The two lovely lips that revealed a smile so heartwarming, Sapnap never knew how he lived before seeing it.

"What, I can't ask to kiss you? You just want me to be a brute about it?" Karl laughed softly, leaning down to eliminate the small space that was left between them.

When their lips connected, Sapnap felt like every other person in the airport had disappeared. Hell, it felt like they were the only two left on the planet. The kiss felt even better than Sapnap ever imagined it would, like their lips were puzzle pieces that were meant to be together.

Sapnap wasn't even sure who broke the kiss, as they remained millimeters apart, catching their breath. He opened his eyes slightly to see a smile on Karl's parted lips. Those beautiful, pink, lips. Without even thinking, Sapnap leaned in again, wrapping his arms around Karl's waist. Karl eagerly reciprocated, pushing his chest against Sapnap's.

Just as Sapnap began moving his hand up Karl's back, a stranger roughly bumped into his shoulder, causing the kiss to break. Sapnap turned to face them, only to be met with-

"Hey. Wake up. You said were going to leave at 3, it's already 4." Dream grumbled, nudging Sapnap's shoulder again.

"Dude. I'm going to kill you. I was having the best-"

"Yeah, yeah. I'm going to bed." Dream said over his shoulder once he was sure Sapnap was awake. Sapnap rolled over, pressing his face back into his pillow with a groan. He wanted to go back, to feel Karl pressed against him, to finally be able to kiss him.

"Fuck." Sapnap muttered, forcing himself to get out of bed knowing there was no way he'd actually fall back asleep and return to the dream. He had never been one for vivid or recurring dreams, but god did he hope he could have another one like that.

Sapnap looked over to his closet, his empty suitcase sitting on the floor in front of it. He chose to walk past it, opting to shower first instead. To no one's surprise, Sapnap had put off packing. Part of him just hated the chore of it, the other part was still hoping for some excuse to come up that would save him from going back to Texas.

Before he knew it, it was already after 5am and he had made essentially no progress with packing. The only thing he had done was make a complete mess out of his room. Packing felt like torture for reasons he wasn't even expecting.

His style had changed so much since he moved to Florida, leaving practically nothing left in his wardrobe that would allow him to blend in while in Texas. All his blue jeans and plain t-shirts had been either left behind or donated once he settled in.

"Dude, I thought you already left. You're not going to get there until after 9 now." Dream said as he walked by Sapnap's room, surprised to see him sitting on his floor, clothes surrounding him on all sides.

"Don't really think that's a bad thing. Why are you even up again? Didn't you just go to bed like 2 hours ago?" Sapnap muttered more so to himself than to Dream.

"It'll be a bad thing when you fall asleep behind the wheel. Why don't you just leave tomorrow, or, I don't know, be a normal person and just fly instead? I'm up because George called me, we're out of sync again." Dream pitched through a yawn, walking through Sapnap's room to sit at his desk

and watch Sapnap continue to sift through his clothes.

"Tomorrow is Mari's birthday or I would. Plus, I want to drive so I can put as much time as I can between when I leave and when I get there. Not to mention- being stranded in Texas with no car? Fuck that." Sapnap turned just in time to catch a random shirt Dream had thrown at him.

"Just remember, if you die-"

"You'll kill me. I know, I know." Sapnap said with a half laugh, throwing a pair of boxers at Dream as he left the room.

Chapter End Notes

Would it really be one of my books with vivid dreaming? <3

The reality behind the screen

Chapter Summary

Shifting focus to see what Karl is experiencing during all this.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Yeah, it's just a week. No, I'll be back before we film again, don't worry. Sapnap has a PC set up out there I think, so I can do some editing if you need me to. Alright, thanks for being flexible with me Jimmy, you're the best!" Karl grabbed his phone from where he had it pressed between his ear and his shoulder, hanging up and tossing it onto his bed.

"Karl?"

"Sean, that you?" Karl called over his shoulder, zipping up his suitcase.

"Yeah, you ready yet? Your flight leaves in like three hours and we still have to drive to the airport." Sean called out as he ascended the staircase, entering Karl's room moments later. "Karl, as your brother, I'm allowed to tell you this. You look like an idiot." Sean said, bringing his hand up to his face to cover his mouth while he laughed.

"And as your *older* brother, I'm allowed to do this." Karl threatened as he lunged in Sean's direction.

"Lay a hand on me and I won't drive you to rescue your *boyfriend* from his family." Sean said smugly, effectively causing Karl to stop in his tracks.

"He's not my boyfriend, you ass. I'm just doing this to be a good friend." Karl trailed off with an eyeroll, knowing that no explanation would change the way his brother interpreted his and Sapnap's friendship. "He sounded stressed last night on the phone about going to Texas, like, he said he doesn't feel like himself when he's there. Maybe having a friend there, having *me* there will, I don't know, remind him he's still himself?" Karl questioned, looking to his brother for approval. Sean quickly burst out laughing, walking towards Karl.

"So what I'm hearing is your dumb 'call me every night so I can do my work but actually we just talk until we fall asleep' plan worked then?" Sean snickered, causing Karl to dart in his direction again until Sean put his hands up.

"He actually helps me focus! How many times do I have to-"

"Okay, okay. I get what you're trying to say, but at least trust me when I say lose the flannel. You look like you just stepped off the set of an old school wild, wild, west film." Sean said with a pat on Karl's back. "Are you sure you can't just confess your love to him like a normal person instead of showing up at his family's house uninvited to surprise him?" Sean continued, grabbing Karl's suitcase off the bed.

"Okay, first of all, it's not uninvited. I talked to his step-mom this morning and she was very excited to meet one of Sapnap's new *friends*. And second, this isn't a *confession of love*, this is simply one

friend doing a kind gesture to make the other's life easier. It's not a confession of love if I don't see him that way." Karl justified, grabbing his personal bag and following Sean down the stairs after heeding his advice and ditching the flannel.

"All I'm saying is that both options are just as obvious but a 'hey btw I've been in love with you since forever, be my boyfriend' text is a much more financially responsible option." Sean laughed, wiggling his eyebrows at Karl.

"Can you drop the '*in love*' stuff? I swear to god if I didn't need you to cat-sit while I was gone, I'd push you down the stairs right now." Karl groaned.

"Love you too, brother." Sean said while flipping Karl off over his shoulder. Karl promptly slapped his hand as the two made their way out to the car.

"So how is this even going to work? I mean, is he already there? Like, is his step-mom going to have to awkwardly sneak out so she can pick you up from the airport? Are you getting a taxi-"

"Christ, Sean, believe it or not, I actually have everything figured out, okay?" Karl interrupted, tightening his grip on the steering wheel. "She said Sapnap would be getting there at 6 or 7pm, she could get me when I land at 4, and-"

"You land at 5." Sean interrupted.

"*No*, I land at 4." Karl shook his head, looking over to Sean before looking back at the road.

"Your flight takes off at 2, it's 3 hours long, so you land at-"

"Time zones, idiot. Houston is an hour behind us. Don't scare me like that." Karl sighed, loosening his grip on the wheel. Signs for the airport were beginning to come into view.

"Regretting not just doing this over a text?" Sean mocked from the passenger seat, noticing how tense Karl had become just from seeing the airport signs.

"For the last time, this isn't like that." Karl muttered.

It wasn't that Karl was regretting his decision. At the end of the day, he did know that being there for Sapnap would help make this week more bearable for him. It was just that Karl was afraid that maybe Sean's relentless teasing might have more truth in it than he was willing to admit. That maybe Sapnap *would* think this gesture was coming from a place deeper than just friendship.

Karl knew that it wasn't Sean's fault for assuming there was more to his and Sapnap's friendship- hell, even the majority of their fans had the same mentality. Karl almost felt bad for them, knowing that none of them have ever had a friendship like theirs. A friendship where you can be honest and open with each other, where they can always make you feel comfortable. A friend who loves you and wants the best for you, one who makes you feel safe. Karl almost pitied those who never had a friend like that.

Karl was thankful that the words of people online or even their friends never got to Sapnap. Karl valued what they shared and recognized how lucky he was to have a friend as special as Sapnap. As long as he had Sapnap as his best friend, he could get through anything.

"Text me when you land. This might be a shock, but I do care if you get there in one piece. I also expect a play by play on how everything goes." Sean said, unbuckling his seat belt to get into the driver's seat.

"There isn't going to be anything to say. We're just going to hang out. I don't know, maybe he'll show me where he went to school or the places he hung out at." Karl shrugged, popping the trunk to get his luggage.

"All I'm saying is if he doesn't run into your arms and kiss you when he sees you, he's not worth it." Sean said with a grin, causing Karl to roll his eyes. "Okay, maybe not *kiss* you, well, not right away at least." Sean nudged Karl one last time before getting into the driver's seat.

"Jesus Christ, Sean-" Karl stopped, pinching the bridge of his nose and letting out a long exhale. "Buffy's feeding schedule is on the fridge. Don't throw any parties and please don't kill my cat." Karl sighed, holding onto the car door. Sean nodded in agreement and Karl shut the door for him.

"I can do this." Karl whispered to himself as he watched Sean drive away, turning and heading into the airport.

Chapter End Notes

The story is going to primarily follow Sapnap, but I will include chapters every now and then that give updates about what Karl is doing/how he is feeling. Also, Sean is poking fun at Karl and Sapnap's friendship in a lighthearted way- not a homophobic way. He believes Karl and Sapnap are both straight, so he enjoys making comments about how affectionate they are with one another as a way to annoy Karl, nothing more.

The long dream of life

Chapter Summary

Sapnap sets out on his road trip to Texas

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Are you sure you don't want to just fly? I'm sure there has to still be tickets available, or-"

"Don't worry, Dream. I'm fine to drive, I swear. If I'm going to survive this week, I'm going to need all the time I can to mentally prepare anyway." Sapnap smiled up to Dream, closing the trunk of his car.

"I'm going to call you every couple hours and if you as much as *yawn*, I will force you to stop at a hotel for the night." Dream said sternly, his arms crossed over his chest and his brows furrowed. Even if this moment was essentially just Dream nagging him, it was times like this that made Sapnap remember just how far he had come.

He had friends who cared about his well being. Friends who checked in on him. Friends who wanted only good things for him. He had friends like Dream, George, Quackity, and of course, Karl.

"Thanks for always looking out for me, Dream." Sapnap said a bit more tenderly than he intended. Even Dream was surprised by the sincerity in Sapnap's voice, the tension in his face melting away instantly. "Anyway, I, uh-"

"Love you, brother. Drive safe." Dream interrupted, pulling Sapnap in for a hug. Sapnap laughed awkwardly a bit, still feeling embarrassed for being wholesome. He and Dream didn't often talk that way to each other- Sapnap didn't really talk to anyone like that. Well, anyone except for Karl.

"Don't go using your George voice on-"

"You did *not*!" Dream scoffed, instantly pushing Sapnap away from his chest with a laugh. Sapnap also laughed, deciding now was a good time to get in the car before either of them said anything else sappy.

"I'll expect a call from you in 2 hours and then nothing for the rest of the drive because you'll forget!" Sapnap called out the window, pulling onto the road, as Dream flipped him off from the driveway.

Sapnap connected his phone to his car's bluetooth, pulling up the directions, but more importantly, putting on music.

"*Great.*" Sapnap muttered to himself, seeing that it was already nearly 8:30am, meaning even if he drove with minimal breaks and the change in time zone, he still wouldn't get there until about 10pm.

Sapnap turned up the volume of his music, doing his best to calm his mind. He still couldn't

believe it was actually happening- that he was finally going back to Texas. He knew it was going to happen eventually, but the fact it was happening *right now* was starting to get to him.

All the shame he felt was already starting to flood his senses. Shame for never standing up for the kids who were bullied by being called gay. Shame for the fact that he had surrounded himself with and was friends with said bullies. Shame that he forced himself to hide who he really was, leaving him feeling like he missed out on so much. Sapnap tried to shake off these feelings, doing his best to focus on the things he *did* like about Texas.

He loved the landscape, how wildflowers would bloom over acres of land. Fields of bluebonnets he could imagine Karl laying in, his camera roll soon being filled with photos of Karl surrounded by colors and light and love.

He loved his childhood home, especially the old wrap around porch. Sapnap wanted to rewrite his memories of sitting alone on the porch swing at night, hiding from the arguments between his parents inside, with new memories of him and Karl sitting next to each other. The only sound that would compete with the crickets would be their laughter.

Sapnap loved stargazing. The sky was so vast and clear at night in Texas, you could see the entire milky way. Laying in the dew soaked grass, watching shooting stars dance through the constellations, and Karl wrapped around him to stay warm.

Fuck.

Sapnap groaned, realizing the only way he could think positively about Texas was if Karl was involved. His music came to a pause, his phone ringing through his car's speaker, Dream's contact displayed on the screen.

"Hello?" Sapnap answered with a questioning tone. Did he forget something? Why would Dream be calling him already?

"So, I may have forgotten to call at the two hour mark, but at least I'm only a few hours late." Dream laughed.

"What are you-" Sapnap paused, checking the time. 3:15pm. "Damn." He sighed, switching his gaze from the clock to the road.

"Something wrong?" Dream asked, confused by Sapnap's response.

"Yeah- I mean no. No, I'm fine. I just had no idea it'd been that long. It really feels like I left 10 minutes ago." Sapnap confessed, refocusing his attention solely on the highway in front of him. It was almost terrifying how he could just completely zone out like that while he drove.

"Do you think maybe you should stop for a bit? Grab some food, water, *shit*- how's your car's battery?" Dream cut himself off mid thought.

"It's okay, I'm at about 30%. Maybe you're right though. I'll probably stop to charge up and grab some snacks soon." Sapnap sighed, putting his car on autopilot so he could rest his eyes for a second. Now that he knew he had been driving for over six hours, the exhaustion was beginning to set in. Maybe driving wasn't worth it after all.

"Okay. If you're still feeling tired after you eat and stuff, I'm serious about stopping for the-"

"I know, I know. I'll be fine to drive once I get some food. I'll talk to you either in two hours or when I get there." Sapnap said with a light laugh, turning the car back to manual once he saw a

sign for an exit with a charging station. "I'm going to pull off the highway now, so I'm going to let you go. Bye, Dream." Sapnap finished, leaning forward to end the call once Dream said his goodbyes.

Once Sapnap had parked and plugged in his car, he headed inside the convenience store. He roamed the aisles, grabbing random snacks, a few energy drinks, and-

"No way." Sapnap whispered under his breath with a smile. He pulled up his phone, taking a photo of one of the slushie machines that had a monster ultra flavored slushie.

I've lived in Florida for over a year and I'm still shocked this exists

Sapnap attached the image to his message, sending it to Karl. He watched as the loading bar on the screen paused just before the message sent, buffering for a few seconds before it eventually failed to send.

"What?" Sapnap mumbled, adjusting the array of snacks and drinks he was carrying, looking at his phone more closely. He tried sending the message and photo again, only to receive the same error pop-up.

Sapnap set his items on the counter, the cashier beginning to scan them in silence as he continued to stare down at his phone. He started a call to Karl, the call going straight to voicemail just as he pinned his phone between his shoulder and ear.

"\$23.75" The cashier said in a monotone voice, placing the final item in the bag.

"Oh, sorry. I don't need any change. Have a good night." Sapnap handed the cashier \$25, still not looking away from his phone as he grabbed the bag and headed back to his car.

Karl never had his phone off. *Ever*. He had too many business calls, sponsored social media posts, and just a general addiction to his phone. As Sapnap climbed back into his car, already turning the air conditioning back up, he continued to just stare at his undelivered message to Karl. Sapnap set down his bag of food, no longer craving caffeine to perk him up. His anxiety about Karl having his phone off was doing a good enough job of keeping him awake on its own.

"Where are you?" Sapnap questioned to himself in a whisper, seeing that not only did Karl have his phone off, but he had stopped sharing his location with him as well.

Chapter End Notes

Ugh, I love himbo Sapnap. Sweet, dumb, himbo Sapnap who has no clue whatever Karl is up to

The short dream of the game

Chapter Summary

Karl begins his own journey to Texas.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Karl had never been the biggest fan of traveling. Taxis, planes, hotels, being in a completely new environment- all of it was a huge stressor for him. Karl always tried to rationalize to himself that the inconvenience of traveling was a small price to pay to see his friends.

Sometimes he wished he lived a more conventional life. One where friends were the people you met in the office at work or the regulars at the same coffee shop you go to. A life where traveling was just for vacations and not the only way to see the people you love most in the world.

Karl was also extremely grateful that he stumbled into this line of work- if it weren't for all the leaps of faith he took, he would've never met such incredible people. People like Jimmy, who was a boss and a best friend wrapped up into one. Or people like Dream, George and Quackity, who he could let loose with, allowing all his inhibitions to fade away.

And of course, Sapnap.

One of the people Karl held closest to his heart, the friend who crashed into his life by a string of random events. Jimmy had only recruited Karl to play in the minecraft video that introduced them because he knew Karl had decent experience with video games. Then there was how Dream had to substitute Sapnap into the video the day of. Karl didn't know it at the time, too focused on the nerves of being a centerfold in one of Jimmy's videos, but Sapnap was soon going to become his closest friend.

And all of this leads us to now. Karl hugged his arms tightly across his chest, doing his best to avoid touching either of the people sitting beside him. Normally when he did fly out to see someone, he always made sure to buy two seats, that way he wouldn't have to sit that close to anyone. Unfortunately, seeing that he bought his ticket the night before the flight, that wasn't an option.

"Shit." Karl whispered to himself, trying to not disturb either of his neighbors as he dug his phone out of his bag. He sighed in relief, seeing that Sapnap hadn't read his last message and his location showed that he was still driving. Karl quickly stopped sharing his location with Sapnap, a smile forming on his face as he scrolled through their previous messages.

Why doesn't teleportation exist? I don't want to drive to Texas

*pretend youre driving to
see me instead :)*

What if I just accidentally drive North instead of West?

seems easy

enough to confuse

well

at least for you

Wow. Rude.

I'm blocking you

if you block me then who will talk to me

while i do my work? :(

Not my problem. Should've thought about that sooner

meh. youre pretty

distracting anyway

I stopped reading after "youre pretty"

you wish

Karl switched his phone to airplane mode once the flight attendants started doing their demonstrations. He'd been on flights enough times to know how it went, so instead he just put in his headphones. Karl was asleep before the plane even took off the runway.

"Karl?"

"Surprise!" Karl said, rushing to Sapnap. They were somewhere Karl didn't really recognize, but there were flowers all around them. They were in a field, a house in the nearby distance.

"What- what are you doing here?" Sapnap questioned, only hesitantly returning Karl's hug.

"I'm here to surprise you! You didn't seem happy about visiting home, so I thought maybe I could make it better?" Karl started off sounding confident, soon pulling away and talking in more of a mumble by the time he finished his thought.

"Karl." Sapnap paused, bringing a hand to his forehead to massage his temples. "I told you this is a really hard place for me to be. I'm happy to see you and all, but..." Sapnap stopped, lowering his hand to his side, turning to look at the house over his shoulder.

"But?" Karl questioned. His heart was beating erratically, Sapnap had never been like this before. It was always hugs and laughter, a smile never leaving either of their faces. It wasn't supposed to be like this.

"But... Just, not here. I feel bad saying this since you came all this way, but I think you should go back home, Karl." Sapnap said blankly, not once looking at Karl.

"Nick-"

"If everyone could please fasten their seatbelts, we are preparing our descent into Houston, Texas." An overhead announcement startled Karl awake. He sat up quickly, receiving judgmental side eyes from the people sitting on either side of him. Nothing like some southern hospitality.

Karl pulled his phone back out of his pocket, pausing the music that was still playing. Once he felt the plane getting closer to the ground, he turned it off airplane mode. As soon as his phone regained service, waves of notifications started making his phone vibrate furiously. He ignored them all, opening his messages with Sean.

sean. this was a mistake.

i dont know what to do

?

Even if the response was hardly anything, Karl was still thankful that his brother responded instantly. Before Karl could begin typing, another message came through.

Something happen?

yes

no

ugh

Well that really gets me up to speed?

i fell asleep and had

a really stupid dream

i surprised him and he

told me to go back home

he couldnt

even look at me sean

Relationship troubles so soon?

You know I'm kidding. I know I tease a lot but I really do think he's a good guy.

He's going to be thrilled to see you. It was just a weird dream.

Karl gave a heart reaction to his brother's last message instead of responding, locking his phone even after notifications continued to pop up. What Sean said should have helped. Karl knew he was being completely irrational, letting a stupid bad dream get him this worked up.

The plane touched down on the runway with a few jostling bumps. Karl didn't even realize his phone had stopped vibrating until one small vibration caught his attention. He pulled out his phone, seeing one notification on his screen. A text from Sapnap's step-mom.

Hi honey! I just got to their airport. I know I'm a little early but I'm just so excited to meet you! Marisol rode along with me, she has a surprise for you. Give me a call when you get this sweetheart!

Karl let out a breath he didn't even realize he was holding in. In a way he couldn't even understand, Sapnap's step-mom, a complete stranger to him, made him feel like he belonged. She alone made

him feel like maybe this wasn't a mistake.

Well, hopefully.

Chapter End Notes

Another parallel as to what is going on from Karl's side of things! Hope you enjoyed
<3

Does it know that we love it?

Chapter Summary

Karl arrives in Texas and meets Sapnap's family.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Hi, I just got your text, where are you again? I'm, uh, just outside terminal B." Karl spoke quickly, pulling his bag behind him. The airport was crowded, as to be expected. It seemed like it should be impossible that this many people are at the airport at the same time on a random Thursday.

"We're walking into terminal B right now! Oh, I can't wait to meet you. We've all watched so many videos of you and Nick, you two are just so-"

"Mom! You're going to embarrass Kuya Nick!" Karl laughed after hearing Marisol interrupt Sapnap's step-mom in the background.

"I'm excited to meet you too. I'm actually kind of relieved to hear that you've watched videos of us before. It makes me feel a little less like a stranger." Karl admitted. He was never one to be forward about his feelings with strangers, but something about her was just so welcoming.

Karl entered the main area of the terminal where the food court, restrooms, and exits were. Just as Karl was about to ask her where they were, a giant sign caught his attention.

A young girl with her hair in braided pig-tails was holding up a sign bigger than she was tall. The sign had pictures of Karl and Sapnap glued all over it, with a message reading, "*Mr. Karl Jacobs*" written in the center. Karl brought his hand up to cover his mouth as he began laughing at the sign.

His abrupt laughter caught both their attention, wide smiles growing on all their face as they recognized each other across the room. Marisol handed the sign to her mom, running in Karl's direction. Karl wasn't sure, but he guessed she couldn't be older than 7 or 8.

"Kuya Karl!" Marisol called out as she approached, practically crashing into Karl as she hugged him. Karl let out an exaggerated groan as he picked her up, spinning once in a circle once he heard her high pitched giggles.

"You must be the birthday girl, Marisol, that I've heard so much about!" Karl said with a smile as she leaned back to get a look at his face.

"You can call me Mari! And you're Kuya Karl, Kuya Nick's friend. Oh, wait, I have a surprise for you!" She said, wiggling out of Karl's hug. Karl laughed as he quickly set her down. She ran back to her mom, who was making her way over to them. She handed Marisol a bouquet of large blue flowers, which Marisol accepted and brought over to Karl.

"You got these for me?" Karl questioned softly, squatting down to be closer to her eye level. Marisol smiled wide enough to show a few of her missing teeth, nodding her head dramatically.

"The Bluebonnets just bloomed in our yard, so I picked these for you!" She said with pride, as Karl accepted the flowers. He had never been given flowers before, let alone from a stranger. He wasn't sure if he was just overly tired from his last minute trip, but he was beginning to feel emotional from the small gesture.

"Thank you, Mari. I *love* them. I know I should probably wait until tomorrow to give you this, but-" Karl paused, looking up to her mom for approval before taking the gift out of his bag. She nodded with a small laugh, signaling it was fine. "Sa- uh, Nick, may have told me that you've recently taken an interest in Pokémon cards, so I got you a whole *box* of them!" Karl finished, dramatically pulling the box out of his carry on.

Marisol practically screamed with joy, giving Karl another hug before taking the box. Karl stood up, finally walking over to Sapnap's step-mom.

"It's nice to meet you Mrs.-"

"Oh, please. Just call me Jen, honey." She interrupted, also giving Karl a hug with the arm that wasn't holding the sign. Karl hugged her with one arm also, the other hand still clutching onto the bouquet of Bluebonnets from Marisol.

"We've got about an hour drive out of the city and I'm sure you must already be exhausted." Jen said while rubbing a hand on Karl's back. Karl gave a light hearted laugh and head nod. Marisol stood up from where she had been inspecting the box of cards, grabbing onto her mom's hand. Jen led the three out of the airport and towards the parked car.

The drive home was filled with Karl sharing Pokémon facts with Marisol after Jen finally agreed she was allowed to open one of the packs. Karl had opted to sit in the back seat with Marisol so he could show her what all the different cards meant. He occasionally caught glimpses of Jen watching them through the rearview mirror, her eyes squinted into a smile.

It wasn't long before they were out of the city. Buildings that touched the sky were replaced with open fields and scattered houses every few miles. Karl didn't realize he had been staring out the window in silence for so long until he felt a light tap against his shoulder. Karl turned to find Marisol fast asleep, her head resting against his arm.

"She likes you." Jen said quietly from the front seat, clearly trying to make sure she didn't wake Marisol up.

"She's a sweet kid. Plus, she likes Pokémon, so she's pretty cool by my standards." Karl said with a muffled laugh, making Jen laugh quietly as well.

"Well, I hope you're this good with all kids, because we have a few of her cousins and Nick's cousins back at the house." Jen said with a weary tone, like even she was tired of having her house overrun with kids.

"Uh, well, if they like video games and cartoons, we should get along just fine." Karl said, a slight nervous laugh escaping him. He wasn't expecting *all* of Sapnap's family to be there, he was anxious enough just meeting his siblings- now he was meeting his cousins?

"We're all very proud of how well Nick has done for himself. They all know you're in the same line of work as him, so they'll all probably just want to ask you a million questions. Everyone seemed very excited to meet you." Jen said in an attempt to soothe Karl. Although Karl would've normally felt more anxious hearing so many people were expecting *something* from him, there was just something about knowing that it was Sapnap's family that helped keep him calm.

Backroads stretch on for miles before Jen turned onto a small dirt road that went all the way through a field covered in bright blue and purple flowers on both sides. Karl looked forward, seeing a large house with an old style wrap around porch quickly approaching.

The bumps from the unpaved driveway woke Marisol, causing her to finally sit up straight. Jen looked back to see Karl staring straight ahead, a blank expression on his face. There were 6 or 7 people standing outside, some standing on the porch and a few kids playing in the yard.

"They're going to love you, don't worry sweetheart." Jen smiled, brushing her hand against Karl's knee before turning back around to put the car in park. Marisol had already unbuckled herself, jumping out of the car to show everyone the box of cards Karl had given her.

Karl made his way around the car more slowly, grabbing his suitcase out of the trunk, already aware of all the eyes on him. As he reached for his suitcase, he noticed the chipping pink and white nail polish still on his fingers.

"Crap." He whispered to himself, grabbing his suitcase and flowers in one hand, shoving his other in his pocket. Karl didn't know much about Texas, but he did know the stereotypes of how men were supposed to look and act. Even though he knew Sapnap has never had a problem with him painting his nails, he didn't know if his family seeing them would embarrass him.

So far, Karl's only experience with Texans were Sapnap's step-mom, and step-sister. He had no idea how any of the men in his family would react to seeing it.

"You don't need to hide any part of who you are, dear. I already said everyone is going to love you. Plus, we've even seen you paint Nick's nails. If anything, Mari might ask you to paint hers for tomorrow." Jen said quietly after watching Karl's not-so-subtle panic. Karl sighed in relief, offering Jen a small smile, pulling his hand out of his pocket.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will return to Sapnap's perspective! If you didn't know, Sapnap's step family is Filipino! Sapnap has said on stream that his younger step-sister refers to him as "Kuya Nick" because 'Kuya' is a term of respect in Filipino culture when talking to someone older than you.

That the universe is kind?

Chapter Summary

Sapnap continues his drive to Texas while his friends keep him company on the phone.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The sun had set about an hour ago at this point, the time nearing 8pm after entering the central standard time zone. Sapnap was still driving down the highway, his car on autopilot as he continued to skip through his playlist. He was regretting not adding more songs to it, already tired of his setlist.

Out of all the things that were weighing on Sapnap- the endless road ahead of him, knowing that Texas's border was only 30 miles away, the way his gas station snacks were no longer agreeing with him- the thing that was bothering him the most was that he still hadn't heard back from Karl.

It wasn't like Karl to go this long without answering, not to mention he hadn't even read Sapnap's message yet when it finally delivered a couple hours ago. In a small way, Sapnap was at least thankful for something to obsess over other than the fact he was only a couple hours from "home".

Dream's contact appeared over Sapnap's spotify, preventing him from skipping any more songs.

"Hey man." Sapnap sighed, putting the call on speaker and leaning back into his seat.

"You sound rough." Dream said bluntly. Sapnap scoffed, knowing that although Dream had no way of knowing it, it was true.

"You try driving for 12 hours and not feeling like-"

"20 hours in an old van! Up the east coast, that's a road-"

"Enough, enough! I get it, you know how I feel. I didn't say you didn't know, all I was saying is it makes you feel dead." Sapnap laughed, leaning forward and taking his car off autopilot. "And, hey- I haven't heard from you in five hours. So much for wanting to check in on me."

"Yeah, about that. I fell asleep." Dream laughed through a yawn, exposing that he really had been sleeping that whole time.

"Who even benefits from you and George being in sync? Neither of you are awake at normal hours anyway." Sapnap's laugh was cut short as the larger than life 'Welcome to Texas' sign came into view. Sapnap didn't even realize Dream had been talking until silence fell between them as he watched the sign approach until he inevitably passed it. He was officially in Texas.

"I'm guessing you just got into Texas, huh? I can feel the mood shift through the phone." Dream said in a much less joking tone now. Sapnap hummed in agreement, not seeing any point in denying his misery. "I don't know why you've been putting off going back, and I'm not going to ask, but it's just a week. One week and then you'll be driving back to the good 'ol sunshine state."

"Yeah, just a week. I'll be fine, sorry for bringing down the mood." Sapnap apologized, focusing on the road ahead of him. It looked exactly the same as before he was in Texas, but just knowing he was there made his stomach churn.

"Don't worry about it. I'm surprised you're not on your nightly call with Karl. Or did you skip it since you're driving?" Dream asked, switching the topic. Again, it was Dream's desire to not talk about heavy topics, at least not for too long, that Sapnap was most thankful for.

"Shit. I completely forgot about it. He still hasn't texted me back from earlier, he must've forgotten too." Sapnap said in a somewhat disappointed tone. Now he knew something was definitely up with Karl. "Dream, I'm gonna let you go and-"

"Leave me for Karl. I'm hurt, not surprised, but hurt." Dream interrupted with a fake snuffle, pretending to cry.

"Save the dramatics for twitter. I'll talk to you later, man." Sapnap let out the last fake laugh he had in him before hanging up. He paused his music as soon as it started back up, pulling open Karl's contact.

With each passing ring, Sapnap could feel his heart sinking. Did he say something that upset Karl? Did Karl just have to go to Jimmy's and forgot to tell him? Oh god, did Karl get into some sort of acci-

"Hello?"

"Karl?"

"Uh, yeah. Hi. Can you hear me?" Karl answered tentatively. Sapnap wasn't positive, but for a split second it sounded like he could hear kids in the background. The laughter was replaced with an unfamiliar buzzing sound.

"Kind of- where are you?" Sapnap asked, unable to hold himself back. He would be lying to himself if he said he wasn't still curious about why Karl had stopped sharing his location with him.

"Uh, just, getting some fresh air is all. Where are you? Shouldn't you be home by now?" Karl answered. If the tentative tone Karl gave earlier wasn't confusing enough, he was beginning to sound even more nervous.

"Yeah, I'm, uh, just over an hour away. Nevermind that- are you okay? Why do you sound stressed?" Sapnap asked, deflecting the conversation away from himself. Talking to Karl was supposed to distract him from Texas, the last thing he wanted was to talk about it with Karl.

"No! I'm not- no, uh, I'm just tired is all. Long day, you know?" Karl responded with a very fake sounding chuckle. Sapnap wasn't sure what was wrong, but if Karl didn't want to talk about it, he wasn't going to push the subject.

"Oh, okay then. Uh, sorry I forgot to call at 8. I hope you didn't push off all your work because of me." Sapnap said sarcastically, trying to both change the subject and lighten the mood. He could feel the tension release from his shoulders once he heard Karl's genuine laugh through the phone.

"Ha- Well, let's just say I probably didn't get as much done as I should've." Karl laughed, sounding a bit more like himself. The smile was already returning to Sapnap's face, as he was picturing Karl probably laying in bed after doing absolutely no work.

"Well, I'm here now. Get out of bed and get over to your desk, chop-chop." Sapnap said with a

laugh. Signs for cities that he unfortunately recognized were coming into view. Sapnap did his best to just look at the road, focusing on the call with Karl.

"I actually think I'll pass on doing work tonight. What if we just-" Karl paused, yawning. "Talk for a bit. You're almost here, right?" Karl asked. Sapnap let out a light laugh, recalling their texting conversation from earlier.

"I didn't *actually* drive north instead of west, you know. And since you're so snoopy, my GPS says I have about an hour and 40 minutes to go until I'm there." Signs for Houston, Texas read only 100 miles to go.

"Oh, yeah, that's what I meant to say. Guess I really am overly tired, huh?" Karl continued to let out small laughs through his words. "I just saw your text, tell me more about that Monster Ultra slushie machine and how it tasted." Karl's voice finally started to sound like he was relaxing into the conversation. Sapnap was still curious as to what had made Karl so nervous before, but again, he would never want to push Karl to have a conversation he wasn't comfortable with.

"Oh so now you wanna know? You didn't care like 8 hours ago when I texted you about it." Sapnap scoffed fondly, continuing before Karl could mistake him for being genuinely upset. "I didn't actually get it but I can imagine it tasted as weird as it looked."

The miles seemed like they were going by even more quickly now that Sapnap had Karl on the phone, keeping him company for the rest of his drive.

Chapter End Notes

Nearly time for the surprise! <3 Also, these were all the chapters I had already written so updates are going to be (hopefully) once a week on weekends from now on!

There are times it is sad

Chapter Summary

Sapnap's anxiety spikes when he's just miles away from home and Karl's sudden nervousness adds to his stress

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Karl, tell me I can do this." Sapnap said with a tone much more serious than any previous part of their conversation held. Karl was still laughing about something they had talked about earlier, his laughter being cut short after hearing Sapnap's voice shift.

"Oh, of course you can do it. Wait, are you he-uh, home?" Karl asked. Sapnap wasn't sure, but the same nervousness that he noticed in Karl's voice at the very start of their call seemed to be back. He recognized the unfortunately familiar stutter in his words, which Sapnap wished he understood the meaning behind.

He already had enough weighing on his mind- his hyper awareness that he was somehow back in the state he swore to himself he'd never return to, the way his body ached from being cramped in his car for so long, and now Karl's unspoken anxiety. It was all beginning to take a toll on him.

Sapnap was already in his home town, the time nearing 10pm. Before answering Karl, Sapnap hit his brakes, pulling off on the side of the road. His tires hit the unpaved shoulder, causing loose gravel to fly up and hit the underneath of his car.

"Sap? What was that? Are you-"

"Talk to me." Sapnap interrupted, putting his car into park. Was he genuinely concerned about what was going on with Karl? Of course. Was he also just looking for any excuse to delay his arrival even further? Also true.

"What, uh, what do you mean? I've been talking to you for hours." Karl said with a nervous laugh.

"You know what I mean. Karl, you're my best friend, you can tell me anything. I don't want to keep pretending like I can't tell how anxious you are. Talk to me about it, maybe it's something I can help with." Sapnap spoke slowly. He wasn't sure if he was crossing the line by pushing the conversation Karl deflected away from earlier.

"Did you stop driving?" Karl asked after a moment of silence. Sapnap sighed, leaning back in his seat.

"I want to give you my undivided attention." Sapnap answered. He took off his hat, holding it in his lap, while he tapped his head against the headrest. He felt guilty for pushing Karl, but he also knew he would have a much easier time facing his family if Karl was one less thing he had to worry about.

"Sap-" Karl paused, letting out a sigh. Sapnap let the silence between them grow, hoping Karl would finish his thought. "I'm just- ugh, it's stupid and I can't even describe it. Please, just get back

on the road."

"Karl, just talk to me-"

"I'll feel better if you finish your drive home-"

"*Karl*, whatever it is we can work through it-"

"So that way I can see you." Karl interrupted again. Sapnap found his words caught in the back of his throat. He instantly thought back to Karl's slip in words towards the beginning of their call, and how maybe Karl asking when he would be *here* wasn't an accident after all. "I'm here, Sapnap. I'm in Texas."

"No you're not." Sapnap responded simply. His brows had already knit together in confusion.

"I am." Karl's statement sounded more like a question, like he was somehow testing the waters.

"I don't believe-"

"Your step-mom is really nice. Marisol brought me a bouquet of bluebonnets when they got me from the airport and she looks just like Jen. Uh, it's a *really* big house. There's a wrap-around porch and an old porch swing. Your entire yard is basically all flowers and-"

"Stop... Don't- don't say all this if you're just messing with me." Sapnap said slowly, his heart rate already beginning to climb. "Don't say that if you're just trying to trick me into starting to drive again-"

"I promise I'm not messing with you. I'm waiting for you on the porch. I'll be the first one you see when you drive up." Karl assured Sapnap. Without even thinking, Sapnap threw his car into drive, skidding back onto the deserted road.

"Whoa, whoa! I can hear your engine through the phone, calm down. I can't see you if you're dead." Karl said with a laugh that still sounded a bit anxious. Sapnap couldn't even bring himself to respond, his emotions getting the best of him.

For the first time in his life, Sapnap couldn't wait to turn into the driveway of his childhood home.

"Wait-" Sapnap finally spoke, his foot now weighing less heavily on the gas pedal. He could see his house on the top of a hill in the near distance, lights turned on all throughout the house. "You... You didn't tell me why you sound-"

"Is that you? I see a car on the road." Karl spoke before Sapnap could finish.

"Why are you nervous, Karl?" Sapnap finished his thought, no longer taking Karl's deflection as an answer.

As ridiculous of a thought that Sapnap knew it was, he still couldn't help but wonder if Karl was nervous about being Texas for the same reason he had been. The stereotypes, the homophobia, that maybe Karl had been hiding secrets about his sexuality too. Sapnap did his best to not indulge himself in that fantasy.

"Are you... Should I..." Karl paused. Sapnap had just turned into the driveway. The stretch from the road to his house had never felt so long before. "Do you want me to leave?" Karl asked so quietly the sound of Sapnap driving over the loose gravel nearly drowned out his timid question.

"Karl, why-"

"I'd understand if you did, uh, want me to leave. It was supposed to be a surprise but I didn't realize until I landed that maybe this is something you'd want to do on your own- I mean you said this is something you've been avoiding and it's hard for you to be here and-"

"Karl." Sapnap cut Karl off mid tangent, putting his car into park. Standing on the porch was Karl, a blanket wrapped around himself, his hand pressing his phone tightly to his ear. As soon as he made eye contact with Sapnap through the windshield, Karl turned around to face the fields surrounding the house.

"I won't be mad if you tell me to go." Karl continued in a whisper. Sapnap stepped out of the car, not even bothering to close the door behind him. He walked up the creaking wooden steps slowly, his phone held at his side.

"Look at me." Sapnap said gently, brushing his hand against Karl's arm to turn him around. Karl complied in silence, the panic that Sapnap had heard in Karl's voice was painted all over his face. "When have I *ever* not been happy to see you, you moron." Sapnap said with a smile growing on his face.

The look of relief, accompanied by a smile growing on Karl's face was something Sapnap found even more beautiful than the first bloom of spring. Sapnap didn't hesitate in grabbing Karl by his shoulders, pulling him to his chest. Karl accepted the embrace, wrapping Sapnap in the blanket with him.

"You're really okay with me being here?" Karl mumbled in Sapnap's neck. Sapnap could feel the heat radiating from his cheeks, the feeling reminding him of the dream he had just before starting his road trip.

"You being here is the best thing that could've happened." Sapnap sighed, hugging Karl tighter.

Chapter End Notes

Thank god it finally happened

To cure it of sorrow would destroy it

Chapter Summary

While Karl and Sapnap greet each other, Sapnap has internal conflict about how he is going to keep his sexuality a secret now that Karl is there.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Fresh country air, the familiar squeak of the porch swing rocking in the breeze, and something Sapnap never thought he would experience in Texas- holding Karl to his chest.

Sapnap wasn't even sure how long the hug had gone on for. It had been a while since he and Karl had seen each other, it being over a month since they both visited George in the UK. Being around their other friends always puts a slight buffer between them. They would still hug and do all the things they normally would, there was always just this unspoken hesitancy accompanied with it.

It had been so long since it was *just* the two of them. The way they were clinging to each other was a clear indication that as much as they both love their friends, they missed being able to hug like *this*.

The hug where you start to sway and lose your balance from how long you've been entangled with another person. The hug where you don't even realize their arms have started to loosen around you until they squeeze you tightly again. The hug where there is no other place in the world you would rather be, because right here in this hug, you're *home*.

It wasn't until Sapnap heard a soft snuffle from Karl that made him pull away. Karl almost immediately refused, keeping his face tucked tightly into the crook of Sapnap's neck.

"Can you at least tell me if these are sad tears or happy tears?" Sapnap whispered, wrapping his arms back around Karl's midsection.

"Relief tears." Karl mumbled almost inaudibly into the thick fabric of Sapnap's hoodie.

"Relief? What do you- wait. You're *relieved* I'm not mad you're here? Karl, hey, look at me." Sapnap insisted, pulling away no matter how badly his body craved being pressed against Karl's. Karl kept his face down at first, wiping away any remnant tears before looking Sapnap in the eyes.

Sapnap was fighting his every instinct to reach his hand up to Karl's cheek, to rub his thumb across his dampened skin, to pull Karl's face down to his. Karl sighed, closing his eyes and beginning to lean forward.

Sapnap didn't even have time to process if this was real or another lovely lucid dream. He closed his eyes, fully prepared to feel Karl press their lips together. Sapnap opened his eyes, blinking rapidly, when he felt Karl press his forehead against his own. He looked up to see Karl's eyes still closed.

"Sorry for crying. I know it's dumb, really. I just had this stupid dream when I fell asleep on the flight. I'd never seen you so, I don't know, *disappointed* in me for something. So, yeah. These are

tears of relief that you're not upset." Karl said quietly, his breath tickling against Sapnap's face.

What he would give to tilt his chin up slightly, to erase the small distance between them, to even have the chance to graze his lips against Karl's.

But he couldn't.

Sapnap knew Karl would never be mad about something like that, a kiss- accidental or intentional. He knew Karl was the type of friend who would laugh it off, even tell their other friends about it as a joke.

A joke was the last thing Sapnap wanted their first kiss to be. He didn't want Dream to laugh about it on some discord podcast like when George drunkenly kissed Karl after losing a bet. He wanted, more than *anything*, for Karl to want to kiss him too.

He knew this wasn't the time. Sapnap understood that Karl was far too fragile in his current state of mind. There was also the complication that they weren't in the comfort of Karl's house or some hotel in Florida. They were in *Texas*, stranded with his family for the next seven days.

So Sapnap did what he was best at. He shoved down his feelings and acted like he wasn't hopelessly in love with the beautiful boy in his arms.

"I can't believe you think so lowly of me that I'm *that* much of a dick in your dreams." Sapnap said sarcastically, successfully lightening the mood when Karl also let out an abrupt laugh. To his pleasant surprise, Karl didn't pull away. Instead, he let his head fall back onto Sapnap's shoulder.

This still didn't feel real to Sapnap. The fact he was in Texas but not miserable, that Karl went to such great lengths to try to make his trip more bearable, that this was possibly the longest hug they had ever shared.

"God, I should probably stop hogging you, huh? Your family doesn't even know you're here yet." Karl spoke through an exhale, finally standing up straight and taking a step back. Sapnap wasn't sure if the sudden chill he felt was because Karl pulled away or because he took the blanket with him when he did.

Karl turned towards the house, nodding in the direction of the front door. Sapnap reached out, holding onto Karl's hand. He had so much he wanted to say, yet he couldn't form a single word. Karl turned, his eyes searching over Sapnap's crestfallen expression.

"Hey, I told you you can do this. I'm sure all the kids are going to be heading to-"

"*All* of the kids?" Sapnap interrupted, his body nearly flinching in an involuntary response. He didn't even realize his grip must've tightened around Karl's hand until he felt Karl's thumb begin to rub circles across the back of his hand.

"Yeah, uh, your cousins are here too. But, it's okay! Everyone's really, uh..." Karl trailed off, watching as Sapnap looked back to his car, the interior lights still illuminated because of the door he left open. It was clear that Sapnap was already looking for an escape plan.

"Hey, hey, it's your turn to look at me." Karl started, separating their hands for just a moment so he could interlock their fingers. This was enough to catch Sapnap's attention, a small portion of his anxiety fading away from the gesture.

"Karl, I *can't*-"

"You *can*. Let's just sit out here for a minute. Come on. We can wait for as long as you need." Karl said with a warm smile and expression that melted Sapnap's heart.

After a few tugs and some more words of encouragement from Karl, Sapnap found himself being led to the swing. The same swing he hid on as a child when the chaos inside became too much for his young heart to handle. The same swing he sat on late at night during his teen years, debating on if his family- if the *world*, could ever accept him for who he is.

It was also the same swing that he imagined sitting on with Karl during his dazed road trip. His idealized daydream had finally become a reality, as they sat on the cool cushions, causing the rusted metal chains to squeak under their weight.

"Here, it's getting cold." Karl said while unwrapping the blanket from himself, now laying it over both of their laps. Sapnap finally looked over to Karl, green meeting blue through slow blinks. Sapnap's gaze traveled to Karl's lips, which he could still feel pressed against his own from his dream.

"You didn't have to do this, come all this way." Sapnap said quietly, looking away from Karl and towards the field of bluebonnets just past the porch's railing. Karl nudged Sapnap's side with a slight laugh, still trying to keep the conversation light.

"Of course I did. I'd be a pretty crappy soulmate if I-"

"Kuya Nick! You're home!" Marisol called out from the open kitchen window behind the swing, causing both boys to jump from the sudden intrusion. Marisol announcing Sapnap's arrival to those who were still awake could be heard behind them.

Sapnap cleared his throat, adjusting on the swing to create a space between him and Karl for the first time. He knew Karl was probably confused, seeing that he's never had a problem being affectionate in front of their friends or even Karl's family, but he couldn't risk it with his own. The last thing he could handle on this trip was his family confronting him with questions about his sexuality.

"Hi Mari. It is *way* past your bedtime!" Sapnap said with a bright smile, standing up from the porch swing once she ran out the side door and down the porch. Similarly to how Karl greeted her back in the airport, Sapnap picked her up and spun in a circle.

Sounds of running footsteps, lights turning on that flooded onto the porch, and voices coming into earshot. Sapnap caught a glimpse of Karl before setting down Marisol. Once Karl noticed Sapnap looking in his direction, he gave him a small smile and head nod for encouragement, just before more of Sapnap's family came outside.

Chapter End Notes

raise your hand if you've ever been personally victimized by your family asking you unwarranted questions about your sexuality

Help them to speak the word they fear

Chapter Summary

Karl opens up to Sapnap about how he views their friendship

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Nick!" a few voices all spoke at the same time. Some of the younger kids all started to pile on Sapnap, resulting in him letting out a few pretend grunts from the force of their hugs. Sapnap looked over to see Karl using his hand to cover the smile on his face, while giving him a thumbs up with his other hand.

"We were starting to get worried." Jen said, walking through the crowd to also give Sapnap a hug. Sapnap mumbled an apology and kissed her cheek. He turned to look at Karl again, surprised to see Marisol and one of his brothers had taken his seat on the swing and were talking to Karl.

For the first time since his family realized he had arrived, Sapnap had a genuine smile on his face. Karl had always been so good with kids, it shouldn't have been a surprise that they all seemed to like him.

"Alright, everyone head inside. You *all* were supposed to be in bed an hour ago." Sapnap's dad announced as he stepped onto the porch. The kids groaned in unison, even his teenage brother. "Come on, Nick and Karl are going to be here all week. You can talk in the morning." He continued, holding the door open.

All the kids shuffled back inside, just leaving Karl, Sapnap, his dad, and step-mom on the porch. His dad walked over, giving Sapnap a hug with a few heavy slaps to his back.

"Good to have you back, son." His dad said with a tight smile and a nod as he quickly pulled away. Jen walked past the group, saying that she was going to head in and make sure all the kids were actually in bed.

It was later than anyone in the house had expected to stay up, already about 11pm. Sapnap's father asked that if they were planning to stay up longer, to stay on the porch to avoid waking any of the kids. Sapnap and Karl complied, saying their goodnights to Sapnap's dad as he headed back inside.

The night air still clung onto the warmth of day, the light breeze only causing a slight chill. Sapnap sat back down on the porch swing next to Karl, not leaving any space between them this time. Without hesitation, Karl grabbed Sapnap's arm, pulling it around himself, resting his back against Sapnap's chest.

Sapnap wasn't sure if his heart was racing from Karl's affection or if his adrenaline was still rushing from earlier.

"You know, I didn't think I'd love it so much out here. I mean, fields that go on forever without any buildings in sight? I thought North Carolina was empty, but this is just a-"

"Do you *actually* believe in soulmates?" Sapnap interrupted. He'd be lying if he said he hadn't held

onto Karl's offhanded comment earlier. A warm breeze blew by, carrying the gentle scent of blooming bluebonnets with it.

"Of course I do- *we're* soulmates, how could I not?" Karl said with a laugh, tilting his head back to smile at Sapnap before facing forward again. Karl's overgrown hair brushed against Sapnap's chin as he shook his head, still laughing under his breath from the question Sapnap asked.

"We're soulmates?" Sapnap questioned in an airy whisper. The sounds of the crickets nearly drowned out his voice.

"Duh. I don't fly halfway across the country with only a one day notice for just anyone." Karl said with another laugh, lifting himself off of Sapnap. Sapnap let his arm fall from around Karl's shoulders to his waist, preventing him from moving too far away.

"Yeah, I guess, but-

"No buts. You're my platonic soulmate and you're gonna have to deal with it. My guess is that this isn't even the first time we've been soulmates." Karl finished with a smile, his gaze bouncing between Sapnap's eyes. As if he was reading Sapnap's mind, Karl quickly turned to face the field before them.

"What do you mean when you say you don't think this is the *first* time we've been soulmates?" Sapnap asked, following Karl's gaze. The meadow in front of them was overgrown with flowers, lightning bugs illuminated the flowers as they flew between them. He was glad that Karl turned away quickly enough to miss how much his face fell when Karl specified *platonic* soulmates.

"Reincarnated soulmates, you know?" Karl questioned, turning back to see Sapnap's clear confusion. Karl leaned back against Sapnap's chest before continuing. "Like, how from the very first time I met you- we clicked. Talking to you never felt like I was meeting someone new. It felt like I was talking to an old friend who I hadn't seen in a while. I like to believe it's because we've been soulmates for a bunch of lifetimes. I can't think of any other way to explain why I always feel the most comfortable when I'm with you. Why I feel the safest when I'm with you. Why I feel, I don't know, the most like *myself* when I'm with you." Karl's voice was soft and gentle by the end of his explanation, his fingers fidgeting with the sleeve of Sapnap's hoodie.

Sapnap had never been a very religious person, but he was praying to any and all gods out there to give him the strength to not lean forward and connect his lips with Karl's. How could something so deep, so personal, so profound, be said in the name of *just* friendship?

"Reincarnated.. *Platonic*.. Soulmates." Sapnap said slowly, testing out the phrase. Karl hummed in agreement, his eyes still fixated on the flowers ahead of them. "In all those lives, do you think we were ever, um, *not* platonic?" Sapnap questioned just as slowly, squinting his eyes shut in case Karl dared to face him.

"Like, romantic ones?" Karl instantly asked. Sapnap was regretting opening his mouth in the first place. Why, *why*, did he have to ask that? What good does it do? What's the point of- "I mean, probably, yeah." Karl answered after a moment of silence between them.

Sapnap continued to pray to whatever higher power was out there. He was begging for his heart rate, which he knew was thumping against Karl's back, to slow down. He asked for the strength to not make *this* lifetime a romantic one- not when he wasn't sure if Karl wanted that too. He pleaded for a sign that maybe Karl *did* want it- that he was saying all this is so Sapnap could finally have an opening.

"I can picture it." Sapnap said quietly, resting his chin on the top of Karl's head. He began to rock the porch swing slowly, just as Karl pulled both his legs onto the swing. "Us as soulmates, either kind." Sapnap finished, hoping that his voice seemed much calmer than he felt.

To his relief, Karl grabbed onto his hand, wrapping it tighter around his waist. Sapnap could live in this moment forever. How close they were, not to mention the softness of Karl's hair brushing against his face with each breath they took in sync.

"Thank you, by the way. Not just for coming here, but for everything you've done since too. I think- no, I *know*, my family definitely loves you more than me." Sapnap said with a laugh, loving the way Karl leaned back into him further, attempting to give him a glare of sorts.

"Does that mean I'm officially a part of the family?" Karl said snidely, readjusting his seat. Sapnap turned so he could wrap his other arm around Karl's midsection, interlocking his fingers around Karl's waist.

"You've always been a part of my family." Sapnap answered, letting his chin slide off the top of Karl's head, now resting his cheek on Karl's shoulder. Karl's neck was centimeters away from his lips. In a perfect world, he would lean forward and place a gentle kiss on Karl's neck.

"You don't mean that." Karl scoffed. Sapnap sat up in surprise, expecting a response more along the lines of 'aww'.

"How are you going to be the one to say we're *soulmates* but when I say you're my family, somehow *I'm* the crazy one?" Sapnap asked immediately. When Karl didn't respond for a second, Sapnap leaned forward, straining his neck so he could see Karl's profile. Maybe it was the low light playing tricks on Sapnap's eyes, but Karl's cheeks looked like they were glowing as much as his were.

"You're just messing with me." Karl said quietly, almost like he was questioning what he was saying.

"You're my family, seriously." Sapnap said again. Karl let his neck fall back onto Sapnap's shoulder. Sapnap knew he should move his head back to allow for more space between them, but he couldn't bring himself to do it. In fact, he was doing the opposite, finding himself leaning towards Karl in microscopic movements.

Karl closed his eyes, rolling his head to the side so his forehead was pressed against the crook of Sapnap's neck. Sapnap closed his eyes, letting out a short exhale. It was probably for the best that Karl didn't notice what he was doing.

"We should go to bed, I'm sure you're exhausted from driving all day." Karl sighed, crossing one of his legs over Sapnap's lap, turning so he could rest a hand on Sapnap's chest.

Chapter End Notes

just kiss already, like damn

It reads our thoughts

Chapter Summary

The classic 'one bed' trope

Chapter Notes

I don't normally do beginning notes, this is strange. I just wanted to say that I found out the news about Techno's passing last night and I really don't know how to cope/manage how I'm feeling. So, I did the only thing I could think of that would bring me comfort- I wrote some lighthearted fluff. I want to clarify that I'm not posting this for 'views' or anything, but more so in hopes that maybe reading something comforting will help bring peace to someone who needs it.

Rest in peace, Techno.

"Thank you for everything you gave to a world that took you too soon." - Charlie
"Life is short but you had a massive one." - George

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Cicadas singing through the night, the smell of recent rain and fresh flowers in the air, a clear night sky that showed all the colors of the milky way. Cold hands shifting over each other, the blanket laying loosely across their laps, each boy with lidded eyes and soft smiles.

"How are you going to say we need to go to bed and then lay on top of me?" Sapnap said in a quiet taunt.

"You're warm." Karl mumbled, his lips unintentionally grazing against the skin on Sapnap's neck.

The goosebumps that raised across Sapnap's skin were hardly from the breeze. He adjusted his grip around Karl, using one hand to pull Karl's other leg across his lap. Karl let out a laugh under his breath, not resisting the embrace in the slightest.

"I'm guessing the guest rooms are taken. Do you want to stay in my room and I'll take the couch?" Sapnap said after a moment of enjoying Karl wrapped around him.

"It's your house, I can take the couch." Karl said through a yawn. "Or we could just both stay in your room." Karl finished, bringing one hand up to rub his eye.

This wasn't anything new, they had shared a bed countless times. Sapnap just felt so torn. He was sure that Marisol or any of his younger cousins would barge into his room at the crack of dawn, eager to spend time with them. Assuming tonight would be like any other time they've fallen asleep together, the kids would surely walk in to see them being completely enmeshed with one another.

"You head in and take my room, I have to get my stuff out of the car." Sapnap whispered, making

no attempt to encourage Karl out of his lap. Sapnap was still using his feet to rock the swing slowly.

"I don't know which room is yours." Karl spoke through another yawn, clearly getting closer to sleep. If they didn't start moving soon, Sapnap would end up carrying Karl *and* his suitcase inside.

"Let me grab my bags and then I'll show you up to it." Sapnap said quietly, kissing the top of Karl's head so gently, he was positive he wouldn't be caught.

Karl began to stir in his lap, begrudgingly pulling his feet back to the ground. Sapnap released his grip around Karl's waist, allowing him to sit up. Just as Sapnap expected, he was certain by the small smile Karl gave him that he surely didn't notice the kiss he stole.

Hushed whispers and tipping toeing through the house. Sapnap led the way, pulling Karl along with intertwined fingers. Creaks of floorboards and his suitcase bumping into corners caused laughter in both of them, resulting in each trying to make the other be quiet.

At the top of the staircase there was a hallway lined with rooms. Sapnap tugged on Karl's hand when he slowed down, continuing to guide him in the right direction. At the end of the hall there was another door, which led to a much smaller staircase.

"I didn't even know this exist-"

"Shhh." Sapnap interrupted, pointing to the hallway lined with doors, each one opened a crack, with his family sleeping inside.

The two ascended a much smaller staircase, which led to a single door. Sapnap opened the door slowly, each creak of the expanded wood causing laughter to escape them both.

Something in Sapnap's heart felt awakened by this experience. The younger version of himself that never got to experience the thrill of sneaking a boy you like through the halls of your house, praying you don't wake anyone. Sapnap felt like he was finally getting to create the memories he missed out on.

"Well, this is it. Ta-da." Sapnap whispered sarcastically, guiding Karl in the direction of the bed. Karl shuffled his feet across the hard wood floors, still holding loosely onto Sapnap's hand. Karl fell back onto the bed with a ceremonious thud, his arms stretched out on both sides.

"I'm disappointed the Spiderman sheets aren't on." Karl squinted one eye open, a smile growing on his face when he heard Sapnap's audible scoff.

"I had those when I was like, *ten*." Sapnap said with an eyeroll, hesitantly accepting the hand that Karl had held in the air. Just as he thought, Karl tried pulling him towards the bed. "I'm gonna sleep downstairs." Sapnap forced himself to say. The small piece of himself that felt liberated by this experience suddenly felt like the same scared kid in the closet all over again.

"You're joking." Karl was practically pouting, his eyes were nearly shut, the blue barely visible through his lashes. Sapnap knew he said he wouldn't stay, but the loose grip Karl had on his fingers was pulling him down like an anchor.

Without even thinking, Sapnap stepped forward, placing his knee on the mattress between Karl's legs. Karl seemed completely unbothered by his advancement, if anything a hint of a smile was on his features.

With Sapnap being closer now, Karl held on tighter to his hand. One step, one lean, one *second* of

his rationality escaping him and Sapnap could be fully laid atop Karl. Sapnap was all too aware of what his body was doing while on autopilot, the feeling being eerily similar to when they were on the porch and he found himself leaning in to kiss Karl.

Once Sapnap noticed himself shifting his weight onto the knee that was on the bed, it was like he was brought back to reality. The reality that he was one misstep from ruining his friendship with Karl. One misstep from outing himself. One misstep from making the most impulsive decision of his life.

Sapnap was already halfway leaned over Karl, making his next move crucial if he was going to get out of this without too much confusion. He leaned to the side, grabbing a fistful of the comforter and dragging it over Karl as he stood back up. Their hands slipping apart as he pulled away felt like a sad reminder of the reality behind the scene.

"You're such an idiot." Karl complained in a muffled groan into the blanket, lazily wrapping himself up in the duvet Sapnap had covered him with.

"Yeah, maybe I am." Sapnap said, more so to himself than to Karl. He backed away from the bed slowly, part of him still debating on crawling in. He ultimately decided against it, pulling the door closed behind him with a small metallic click.

He made the same walk through the house, just with much less fun this time. The house was exactly the same as when they entered, but it *felt* so much different now. Sapnap finally wandered into the living room, pushing the piles of stuffed animals and stray toys off the couch.

Sapnap groaned as soon as he laid down, pulling out a toy he must've missed from underneath him.

"Yeah. I'm definitely an idiot." He sighed, adjusting a frumpy pillow beneath his neck.

Chapter End Notes

Boo. Get in the bed.

And yet they play the game

Chapter Summary

Tensions rise as Sapnap and his dad have breakfast together, while Karl attempts to diffuse the situation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

A mixture of the smell of bacon and aching back pain pulled Sapnap from his sleep. He had dreams of him and Karl, but he also had some much less pleasant dreams. That was something about being in Texas that he forgot- the nightmares.

Sapnap let out a low groan as he pulled himself into an upright sitting position. The house was quiet, which meant it must've been far too early. He stood up slowly, already in search of something to help with his back pain.

Of course, sleeping in his own bed would feel better than any remedy medicine could do, but that option was off the table.

"Good morning." Jen said as soon as Sapnap walked past the kitchen. He halted his pace, walking a few steps backwards so he was in the doorway again.

"Morning." Sapnap croaked, his voice not adjusted to being awake yet. Jen laughed, pointing to the full plate she had just added two slices of toast to. Sapnap decided to accept the offer, considering his back was already feeling better after stretching.

"He's waiting on the porch for you." Jen said with a smile once Sapnap grabbed the plate, a piece of toast already hanging out of his mouth. She nodded towards the porch door, her smile growing when she saw Sapnap's eyes light up.

Sapnap weaved his way through the kitchen, kissing the side of Jen's head as he walked past. She waved him away, clearly wiping the crumbs out of her hair with a laugh. He swung open the porch door, eager to see-

"Morning, son." Sapnap's dad said through an exhale after taking a sip of his coffee. Sapnap felt genuinely guilty that he was so disappointed to be greeted by his father and not Karl. He did his best to put on a smile, making his way to sit on one of the patio chairs across from the swing.

"Hey, dad." Sapnap shifted in his chair, trying to balance his plate in his lap. He always felt uneasy being alone with his dad. His dad had never done anything *wrong* as a parent per say. He just never did a whole lot right. It's not just experiencing bad things that can mess up your childhood, but also all the good things you missed out on too.

As to be expected, silence instantly fell between them. Birds sang through the silence, the breeze causing the wind chimes to ring. Sapnap was hyper aware of every bite he took, already feeling like there would be no way he could finish the large breakfast Jen had made for him.

"Thanks Jen!" Karl said over his shoulder, pushing the porch door open with his knee, a cup in

each hand. It hadn't even been five minutes of him being alone with his dad, but Sapnap felt like had been suffocating until his eyes landed on Karl.

Karl's hair was sticking up in all directions, a sight Sapnap would marvel at every time, no matter how many times he saw it. He had a blanket draped over his shoulders, just like he had last night. He looked like what Sapnap wished he could wake up to every morning

"Oh, sorry. Um, here. I can head back in." Karl said awkwardly, looking between Sapnap and his dad, as he handed Sapnap one of the cups of orange juice.

"Don't be sorry, take a seat." Sapnap's dad said with a nod to the chair next to Sapnap. Karl obliged, practically scurrying into the seat. "Where's your food?" Sapnap's dad asked with genuine confusion on his face.

"Oh, I, uh-"

"Karl doesn't eat in the morning, makes him feel sick for the rest of the day. Be sure to drink your juice though." Sapnap said, instinctively reaching over and rubbing the back of his hand against the fingers Karl had wrapped around his cup. Karl let out a fond scoff-like laugh, shifting his legs so their knees were touching, before taking a sip like Sapnap instructed.

Sapnap looked to Karl, reaching up to comb his fingers through Karl's hair in an attempt to tame it. Just before his fingers could trail through Karl's brunette waves, Sapnap looked up to be met with his father staring at him with a completely blank expression. Sapnap's heart dropped as he retreated his hand back to his side, leaning away to create more space between him and Karl. Sapnap cleared his throat after taking sip of his juice.

"So, what are we doing for Mari's birthday?" He asked, desperate to start a conversation before anyone could point out the obvious tension.

"Jen said that some of Mari's friends from school are going to come over in a few hours and the party will officially start around one." Karl chimed in, trying to participate in the conversation. Sapnap's dad nodded in Karl's direction, silently saying '*yeah, what he said*' while continuing to drink his coffee.

"So... When do I start asking to see baby pictures or to hear all the embarrassing stories from Sa-, uh, Nick's childhood?" Karl continued after silence fell over the group again. Karl was trying to hide his smile with his cup, but Sapnap noticed it instantly when he turned to face him. To Sapnap's surprise, his dad let out an unexpected laugh.

"You sound like one of Nick's girlfriends from back in the day. Kind of looks like one too. Yeah, what was the name of the girl you went with in college? Started with a 'c' or-"

"That was Cristine and Karl does *not* look like her." Sapnap interrupted, his brows furrowed and voice sharp. The laugh embedded in his dad's words faded away, causing another wave of tension to sit between them. Sapnap set his primarily full plate on the small table next to him, giving up on trying to eat any more.

"Uh, well, I say that if this Cristine *does* look anything like me, that must mean he's got pretty good taste." Karl said to Sapnap's dad with a laugh. Sapnap knew instantly that the laugh was forced but he was thankful his dad didn't realize this. His dad took the opportunity to laugh along for a moment before standing from the swing.

"Well, I better start setting everything up in the yard. You boys come give me a hand when you're

done with breakfast." He spoke while he walked between them, hesitantly placing a hand on Sapnap's shoulder. He gave his back a few pats as he walked by, the silence continuing even after the porch door shut behind him.

"You should finish your-"

"I'm so fucking sorry. He shouldn't have said that- and, and, to imply you look like a girl, let alone a girl I *dated*, I'm just- ugh. I'm sorry." Sapnap brought his hand up, covering his face as he stuttered through his apology on his dad's behalf.

"Sap, come on. It's fine, really. It's not like I've never been told that I look pretty feminine or whatever. He was just trying to make conversation-"

"But he shouldn't have said-"

"It's *fine*. Really." Karl interrupted, taking Sapnap's hand in his own and pulling it away from his face. Sapnap turned to face Karl, a small but genuine smile growing on his lips for the first time that morning, as he reached over and finally began tidying Karl's hair.

Karl looked visibly more relaxed now that Sapnap understood he wasn't upset about his dad's comments, leaning his head forward so Sapnap had a better angle. After a minute of Sapnap attempting to get the tangles out of Karl's hair, he leaned back in his chair, looking over the field as the sun hung low in the sky.

"Now, seriously, finish your breakfast." Karl said with a smile, taking another sip of juice. Sapnap wasn't sure when it even happened, but he felt comfort in realizing that Karl had moved closer to him so their legs would be touching again.

Chapter End Notes

I kept thinking of that one old tiktok audio that was like "because your son looks like a girl!" please tell me someone knows what I'm referencing

But it would be so easy to tell them...

Chapter Summary

Sapnap finds himself in a tough predicament when he finds out why his brother thought he left Texas

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The morning sun was beating down on Sapnap, his back already drenched in sweat. He thought he was a fit person, playing sports with Punz and working out with Dream, but manual labor was a completely different story.

His dad had rented a few ridiculous inflatable bounce houses that required much more set up than anyone was anticipating. Sapnap wiped the sweat off his forehead, quickly putting his hat back on to shield him from the sun.

"So, I know I'm not much help, but I come bearing reinforcements and lemonade!" Karl called out from the porch, making his way to the backyard. Sapnap looked over to see Karl walking over with two glasses of lemonade and both his brothers following closely behind.

"About time you two got up!" Sapnap yelled, walking towards them. He watched intently as Karl brought a glass of lemonade to his dad first, a conversation striking up between them.

"You know, dad is the one who chose to have these for her."

"Yeah, wish he cared that much when we were-"

"Hey." Sapnap interrupted, turning to face his younger brothers. He knew exactly how they were feeling, the envious jealousy for the childhood they all missed out on. "There are two more stakes that need to be hammered down on this one." Sapnap continued, raising his eyebrows when neither boy moved. Sapnap sighed, looking back to see Karl walking towards them.

"Look, I know it sucks and it's unfair. I know that today is one big bitter reminder of all the things we didn't get. Regardless, do your best to be happy that Mari is never going to have to go through what we did. She doesn't deserve that." Sapnap finished. His youngest brother looked a bit guilty, stepping forward to grab the hammer.

"She may not deserve it, but neither did we-"

"Andrew-"

"Fuck this." His brother said under his breath, stepping away from the group and heading back inside. His youngest brother turned to Sapnap, clearly expecting him to say the perfect thing.

"Don't worry about him, Ben. I'll go talk to him. Go ask dad what you can do to help." Sapnap said, ushering his brother away just as Karl approached. Karl watched with concerned eyes as Ben walked past him in silence.

"What's going on?" Karl asked quietly, handing Sapnap the other glass of lemonade. Sapnap took a large sip before answering.

"It's nothing, don't worry about-" Sapnap paused when Karl brought a hand to his face, resting the back of his fingers against his cheek. Karl's brows furrowed, as he took back the glass of lemonade, pressing it against Sapnap's cheek. "What are you-"

"You're burning up, you need to cool down." Karl insisted, swatting away the hand Sapnap tried using to push him away. "And it didn't seem like nothing. Ben has been friendly since I got here, but Andrew's hardly spoken to anyone."

Sapnap sighed, letting himself enjoy the cool glass Karl had pressed against his cheek. He closed his eyes, while he thought of a response that wouldn't make Karl more concerned. He let out a laugh when he felt a faint breeze, opening his eyes to see Karl fanning his face.

"Really, don't worry about Andrew. We just, uh, we don't do well with birthdays around here." Sapnap finished, taking the drink out of Karl's hand so he could have another sip. Karl brushed his fingers against Sapnap's face again, just as Sapnap looked over to see his dad staring at them.

Sapnap instantly took a step away from Karl, cool fingers no longer grazing against his skin. His dad quickly got back to work, calling over to Ben. Sapnap looked back to Karl, a dazed look of confusion on his face.

He felt like he was being pulled in a million different directions. He needed to appear straight for both his family and Karl, but 'acting straight' looked very different for each. There was also the nagging voice in the back of his head that wondered when it would be time for him to finally drop the act altogether.

"I can try to not worry about Andrew, but I'm not going to pretend I'm not worried about you." Karl said quietly, looking in the direction that caused Sapnap to suddenly withdraw.

It would be so easy for Sapnap to tell Karl everything. What life was like growing up. What he and his brothers heard and hid from every day. Why he was so desperate to leave Texas and never come back.

"I should really go talk to him. If my dad asks, just tell him I'm in the bathroom or something." Sapnap deflected. It seemed like coming clean would have to be a conversation for another day. He stepped away before Karl could stop him, jogging in the direction of the porch.

Sapnap walked quickly through the house, knowing exactly where Andrew would be. He walked into Andrew's room, going in the closet, and sliding on the floor next to the door to the crawl space. Andrew never cared that he had the smallest bedroom, since he thought the hidden room in his closet was the perfect place.

"Andy Armstrong is awesome." Sapnap said in a monotone voice.

"No one calls me Andy anymore." Andrew called out after a moment of silence.

"Does that mean you changed the password?" Sapnap asked, trying to muster up a laugh.

The small door opened a crack, sounds of shuffling soon followed. Sapnap accepted the invitation, crawling into the small room. He and Andrew were sitting shoulder to shoulder, the stuffy air almost impossible to breathe.

"I can't believe you still hang out in here, this room feels like it somehow got s-"

"What do you want?" Andrew interrupted, doing his best to create even a fraction of space between them.

"I wanted to see if you were okay." Sapnap said with a sigh. Silence grew and sweat accumulated, the atmosphere filled with tension.

"You left." Andrew said with resentment, facing towards the wall.

"I left." Sapnap confirmed quietly.

"You left us behind. You never came to see us. Not on mine or Ben's birthdays, not for Thanksgiving or Christmas. Even when you were in college you always came home for those. You haven't come back once since you moved to Florida, but now that it's Marisol's birthday, you're here." Sapnap could hear in Andrew's voice that he was on the verge of crying.

"Andrew-"

"Ben doesn't remember most of it. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad he doesn't. But I remember, you *know* I remember, and you still left. You had an out and you took it. Seeing me and Ben probably hasn't even crossed your mind." Andrew cried, his voice cracking through his sentences.

"I didn't stop visiting because I don't care about you-"

"Bullshit." Andrew interrupted. Sapnap could feel his heart breaking, realizing how badly Andrew had misinterpreted the situation this whole time.

"I wasn't much younger than Ben is now when I figured it out." Sapnap spoke slowly. He had never done this before, but he was willing to do anything to make his brother realize the truth. "It was halfway through 6th grade when this new kid moved to town. His assigned seat was next to mine in history. I remember he had wavy hair and a bunch of freckles." Sapnap laughed a bit, thinking back. Andrew slowly turned to look at Sapnap, but he continued.

"He was also shorter than me, which I liked, *a lot*, seeing that not many guys were. He talked to me that first day and I remember my palms got sweaty and I kept fumbling over my words. I actually went to the nurses office after that class because I thought I was sick or something." He laughed again, thankful to hear a muffled laugh from Andrew.

"For the next couple of weeks, I always got the same nervous but excited feeling when I would go to that class. Then, one day, we were partners in this class game, and when we won first place, he grabbed my hand and held it up in the air while the whole class cheered. That was when I realized the unexplained nervousness wasn't some mystery illness and the excited feeling wasn't because I just *really* loved history."

"You.. Wait-"

"Not long after that, this rumor started that he was gay. I guess some of the guys in our history class were telling people that he tried holding my hand and it was super obvious I was uncomfortable. After that rumor took off, everyone in our entire grade called him gay, called him *slurs*, and made him a total social outcast." Sapnap continued, the smile on his face dropping with each sentence. Andrew had turned completely to face him at this point, waiting for him to continue.

"He stopped coming to school after a few months. Uh, turned out he ended up being homeschooled for the rest of the year. After that, 'gay' was the new biggest insult at school. I learned from a very young age that Texas isn't a safe place for gay people to be." Sapnap paused, looking over to his

wide eyed brother.

"I'm gay, Andrew. That's the reason I didn't come back to Texas, not because of anything to do with you or Ben." Sapnap finished, closing his eyes and resting his head against the drywall.

Chapter End Notes

Going to try moving up to two chapters a week when possible. If I upload twice, it'll be on Wednesdays and Fridays :)

To tell them how to live is to prevent them living

Chapter Summary

Andrew points out something about Sapnap and Karl's friendship that Sapnap hadn't noticed before.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"No you're not." Andrew finally broke the silence. Sapnap sighed, bringing a hand up to wipe the sweat that had accumulated on his forehead. "You've had like a million girlfriends."

Sapnap couldn't help but let out a laugh, opening his eyes to see his brother's skepticism. Sapnap turned to put his back against the door, crossing his legs in front of him.

"Yeah, well denial isn't just a river in Egypt." Sapnap scoffed. "Just because I knew I was gay, doesn't mean I *wanted* to be gay. I tried everything I could think of to *not* be gay. Having girlfriends, playing sports, going to church with grandma and grandpa, anything. Much like the closet we're in now, it sucked." Sapnap said while adjusting again, already getting uncomfortable with his current sitting position.

"You're really gay?" Andrew finally asked after processing everything Sapnap had shared.

"Yes, I'm *really* gay. I haven't actually, uh, told anyone about it. Can you keep this to yourself?" Sapnap asked nervously. Although he was surprised by how easy it was to finally come out to someone, there was still the fact his secret was in someone else's hands weighing on him.

"Of course, I'd never tell." Andrew assured him. "Um, but if you don't want anyone to know, why did you bring your boyfriend?" Sapnap felt like his heart was stuck in his throat hearing his brother's question.

"Karl isn't my boyfriend." Sapnap said after a noticeably long pause.

"Oh. You want him to be though, don't you?" Andrew pressed gently. Sapnap had his eyes closed again, taking his hat off and running his fingers through his hair.

"Yeah. Yeah, I really do." Sapnap said through an exhale. It felt strange talking about his feelings for Karl aloud to someone. He had never even dared to write them down, not willing to risk anyone ever reading it.

"So what's your deal then? Does he already have a boyfriend or-"

"Do you think Karl's gay?" Sapnap interrupted, opening his eyes. Andrew looked shocked by the question, adjusting to also be sitting cross legged across from Sapnap.

"Dude wears nail polish-"

"Nail polish doesn't make you gay." Sapnap interrupted.

"Okay, but he's *super* touchy with you-"

"He's like that with everyone." Sapnap sighed. "And being affectionate also doesn't make you gay." He continued, letting out a small laugh. Andrew wasn't joking, but just hearing his brother's idiotic ideas of what makes a person gay was kind of funny.

"What about the way he looks at you?" Andrew asked through Sapnap's laughter.

"What the hell are you talking about now?" Sapnap laughed, wiping away more sweat off his face.

"How he looks at you. Like you're the best thing in his life. Like he's in love with you or something." Andrew shrugged.

Sapnap couldn't find any words to say, any way to negate what his brother was saying. All his mind was doing was thinking back to his and Karl's conversation on the porch swing last night. How Karl wrapped himself in Sapnap's arm and explained that he believes they have a love that transcends lifetimes.

"How would *you* even know what that looks like?" Sapnap tried to maintain his composure, making a snide comment. Andrew seemed unbothered by Sapnap's deflection.

"Because Karl looks at you the way dad looks at Jen." Andrew explained, a slight pain in his voice. "And he never looked at mom like that. That's how I know what it looks like when you stare at a person you're in love with."

Sapnap wasn't sure if it was the musty air, the rising temperature from having two bodies cramped in a small room, or what his brother said that was making air refuse to enter his lungs.

"He doesn't look at me like-"

"He does, Nick. I think he wants to be with you too." Andrew continued, cutting off Sapnap's stuttered sentence.

"I can't think straight in here, let's go." Sapnap said over his shoulder, already crawling out of the small room.

"Apparently you can't think *straight* at all." Andrew said from behind, covering his mouth with his hand to suppress his laugh.

"See, *that*, jokes like that can't leave this closet." Sapnap glared over his shoulder.

"Not the only thing that can't leave the closet." Andrew was holding back more laughter.

"Shit, okay, I really walked right into that one." Sapnap said with a laugh, stepping out of the closet with Andrew.

The two made their way back through the house. All the other kids were awake at this point, the house now filled with conversations. Sapnap looked over to Andrew, seeing the smile that had just returned already fading.

"Hey Jen." Sapnap called out, grabbing onto Andrew's shirt to stop him from going back outside. Jen turned around from her place in the living room, looking between both boys. "After the party, is it alright if I take Andrew out for a driving lesson? We'll use my car, of course." Sapnap asked.

"Uhh." Jen started, looking between them.

"No way! Seriously? You'd let me drive your Tesla?" Andrew exclaimed.

"Well, just be careful, I suppose." Jen said wearily, giving Andrew an amused look before returning her attention to the party favors she was packing.

"Thanks Jen." Sapnap called out, pushing Andrew onto the porch. "Hey, if you're really that bad, I can just put autopilot on." Sapnap teased, his laughter soon fading when his eyes landed on Karl.

Karl was already watching him. His smile was soft at first, his hand held above his eyes to shield them from the sun. Once he saw Sapnap looking back at him, his smile seemed to grow exponentially. Had Karl always looked at him like that?

"That's the look I was talking about." Andrew whispered. Sapnap turned to face him, an *'I told you so'* look plastered across his brother's face. Sapnap raised his hand to give Karl a timid wave. Karl returned the wave, his lips parting and the sound of his laugh carrying across the yard.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Sapnap lied, elbowing his brother.

"You know, earlier, you never said he wasn't gay. You just said the reasons I gave were wrong." Andrew turned, talking more quietly now that Karl was walking towards them.

"He's straight." Sapnap said, sounding more like he was trying to remind himself rather than convince his brother.

"None of my straight friends look at me like *that*." Andrew countered.

"He's straight. I can't have him." Sapnap repeated, trying to engrain the message into his own head.

"Possessive much?" Andrew laughed just as Karl approached the bottom step of the porch. "Hey Karl." He said as he walked down the steps and in the direction to where Ben and their dad were now working on inflating the bounce house.

"Hey Andrew." Karl said with a bit of hesitancy, looking to Sapnap with raised eyebrows.

"Possessive about what?" Karl asked, stepping onto the porch to stand in the shade with Sapnap. Sapnap reached up, brushing away the hair that was stuck to Karl's forehead with sweat.

"My car." Sapnap lied with a smile, looking over Karl's shoulder to see Andrew shaking his head at him, walking backwards through the yard.

"I think that's the first time he's talked to me. What did you say to him?" Karl asked. He stood by Sapnap's side, leaning against him for a second before standing up straight again. The usual panic Sapnap felt whenever he touched Karl around his family wasn't present for once.

"Told him I'd take him out for a driving lesson tonight." Sapnap said as he wrapped his arm around Karl's hip, pulling him back into his side. Karl looked around, seeming to take on Sapnap's paranoia.

"You alright?" Sapnap asked, reaching over his other hand to tuck a hair he missed behind Karl's ear.

"Yeah, yeah. Uh, you sure this is okay? I've kind of picked up that you don't-

"This is always okay." Sapnap smiled, tightening his grip around Karl's side.

Chapter End Notes

Finally some fluff amongst the angst

I will not tell the player how to live

Chapter Summary

An unexpected interaction with his step-mom leaves Sarnap stunned. Karl asks for an explanation to Sarnap's behavior.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Children yelling, high pitched laughter filling the air, water balloons soaring across the sky. Sarnap felt like he was in his own personal hell. He had just managed to get away from the chaos, hiding out in the kitchen.

Sarnap had given a dozen piggy-back rides before he felt he had earned a moment of peace. He looked out to the yard through the kitchen window, a smile working its way onto his tired face once his eyes landed on Karl.

Karl was sitting at a comically small table, clearly not designed for anyone over the age of 10. He had a line of about 3 or 4 girls all waiting for him to paint their nails.

"He's really great with kids, huh?" Jen spoke up from behind. Sarnap turned around quickly to see Jen standing right behind him, a smile on her face.

"Oh, yeah I guess. I've only really seen him with his friend's toddler before, so I knew he was good around kids, but, uh, yeah." Sarnap trailed off, turning to face the sink again. He splashed cold water on his face, hoping that Jen would assume his red complexion was from the heat and not their conversation.

"He's welcome to join anytime you visit, you know. It's really great having both of you here... together." Jen continued, walking forward to stand next to Sarnap at the sink while he patted his face dry. "Plus, he's a cutie, don't ya think?" Jen asked, stealing a glance in Sarnap's direction.

"Karl? O-oh, I haven't, uh, why are you asking me that?" Sarnap deflected with a laugh. He was regretting drying his face, because now it would just look strange if he splashed himself with water again.

"No reason, just thinking out loud I guess." Jen said with a soft smile, stepping back out onto the porch.

Sarnap was trying not to panic. Did she see them earlier on the porch when he had his arm wrapped around Karl's waist? God, did she hear them talking last night? Did she see them practically laying over each other on the swing?

"Fuck." Sarnap sighed to himself, hunching over the sink. Today had already been stressful enough with him coming out to Andrew, the last thing he expected was for anyone else in his family to suspect anything.

He didn't want to admit it out loud, but he actually found comfort in hearing Andrew's disbelief that he's gay. It made him feel like he had done a good job of hiding his sexuality. All that confidence

had gone out the window with one innocent question.

"Plus, he's a cutie, don't ya think?"

Sapnap was pulled from his racing thoughts when he heard the porch door swing open. He looked up to see Karl with a bright smile. Unfortunately, his smile fell once he saw Sapnap's expression.

"I was just coming in to grab some water- are you alright? You look like you've seen a ghost." Karl said while approaching him. Karl smelled like nail polish and freshly cut grass.

"You smell funny." Sapnap said with a smile, ignoring Karl's question completely. Another simple question with a heavy answer he didn't feel like sharing. Sapnap turned around, jumping to sit on the kitchen counter.

"Painting nails in the great outdoors does that to a person." Karl scoffed. Sapnap knew by looking at Karl's eyes that he was still concerned but was choosing to not push the topic for his sake.

"Jen likes you." Sapnap said, a genuine smile tugging at the corners of his mouth when Karl hopped up to sit on the counter with him. "Even said you were a '*cutie*' if I recall correctly." Sapnap laughed, reaching across the sink to fill a cup with water for Karl.

"If you're trying to give me permission to get her number, I already have it." Karl laughed, accepting the glass of water.

"And I'll be deleting it from your phone the second I drop you off at the airport." Sapnap scoffed, taking back the glass of water and taking a sip as well.

"Wow, and here I thought you'd want to have a road trip back to Florida together. Fine, may as well start checking for flights now." Karl said dramatically, getting ready to push himself off the counter. Sapnap grabbed his wrist, stopping Karl in his tracks.

"You *really* want to spend 16 hours trapped on the highway with me?" Sapnap asked. He didn't necessarily care to talk about their plans home, he just didn't want Karl to leave his side yet.

"I mean, I didn't buy a one-way ticket because I planned on moving in." Karl laughed, leaning into Sapnap's side. Sapnap could tell that Karl was definitely much happier now that he wasn't so paranoid about his family seeing them be affectionate. Granted, they were the only ones inside at the moment.

"You're gonna regret it when you have to get on a plane after driving for half a day." Sapnap warned, his hand traveling from Karl's wrist to around his waist.

"Half a day? That's not a road trip! I wanted to stop and see all the sights." Karl sat up as he spoke. Sapnap was having trouble deciphering if Karl's pout was genuine or not. With Sapnap's delay, Karl decided to take the opportunity to get off the counter.

"Don't go back out yet." Sapnap said, his hand trailing down Karl's arm.

"Sorry, but I am in high demand right now. You'll just have to get in line." Karl smirked through his sentence, his hand slipping out of Sapnap's as he slid off the counter. Even though Karl was no longer sitting next to him with their hips pressed together, Sapnap would be lying if he said he didn't enjoy this view.

The countertops were rather high, making Karl a couple inches shorter than him from where he was seated. Karl was nearly at the door when he paused, turning around and walking back to

Sapnap.

This would be the most ideal angle for Sapnap to hold Karl's face in his hands, to angle his chin up slightly, and to lean down to press their lips together. He was so wrapped up in his fantasy, he practically missed Karl taking the water cup out of his hand.

"I believe this was *mine*." Karl laughed, leaning to Sapnap's side to refill the glass again. Sapnap placed a hand on the top of Karl's head, fluffing up his hair a bit. Karl made a sour face, trying to lean away. Sapnap's hand traveled to the back of Karl's neck, keeping him standing between Sapnap's legs.

"Thanks for being here." Sapnap said earnestly. Karl's joking pout transformed into something much more genuine.

"You don't need to keep thanking-"

"I know I don't *need* to. I just want to." Sapnap cut Karl off. Maybe it was what Andrew said getting into his head, his distorted perception of their relationship feeling a bit too confident, but Sapnap pulled Karl to his chest.

"Nick, are you-"

"Oh my god, can't I give you a hug without you '*Nick*'-ing me?" Sapnap laughed, leaning back to look at Karl. His smile began to fall when he saw the uncertainty in Karl's eyes, his arms becoming limp around Karl.

"Of course you can, it's just-" Karl cut himself off, looking around the vacant kitchen. Instead of turning to face Sapnap again, Karl leaned his back against his chest, pulling on Sapnap's hands until they were wrapped around his shoulders.

"It's just what?" Sapnap asked, leaning down to rest his forehead against Karl's shoulder.

"I'm just worried about you." Karl said quietly.

"There's nothing to be worried about." Sapnap mumbled. At that moment, he couldn't mean those words more honestly. No negative thought could weasel its way into Sapnap's mind when he had Karl in his arms.

"But before, when I first came in-"

"It was nothing-"

"I feel like every time I'm not with you, something bad happens." Karl finished his thought. "When I came out on the porch this morning and you were with your dad, you looked like you were suffocating. Then, there was whatever happened with Andrew and Ben earlier. And just now, when Jen came outside after talking to you, you looked sick to your stomach." Karl continued, leaning further into Sapnap's chest.

Sapnap adjusted his grip around Karl, wishing to go back to the feeling he had only a minute ago, where everything was fine as long as he was holding Karl.

"I just want to know what happened to you here. Help me understand." Karl said quietly, pulling away just enough to look at Sapnap over his shoulder. After a few seconds of deliberation, Sapnap lifted his head off Karl's shoulder, nodding slowly.

"Tonight. After the party and after I take Andrew for a drive. I'll explain." Sapnap tightened his grip around Karl, returning his forehead to Karl's shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

the hurt/comfort is so close i can smell it

The player is growing restless

Chapter Summary

Sapnap opens up to his brother Andrew about why he never told Karl about his past.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hours drifted by in a haze, nightfall somehow already creeping up on him. Sapnap had just pulled the final stake out of the ground, the bounce house toppling over on itself. While he looked completely fine on the outside, Sapnap's mind had been racing ever since his conversation with Karl.

He knew that Karl deserved answers- he even knew exactly how he could phrase it to *casually* exclude the part where his sexuality came into play. That was it though- the fact that he was going to be intentionally lying to Karl.

A lie by omission is still a lie nonetheless- or whatever the saying is.

"-don't have to if you're not up-"

"Huh?" Sapnap interrupted, turning around to see Andrew standing behind him, looking around a bit nervously.

"I was just saying we don't actually have to do a, uh, driving lesson tonight." Andrew repeated, looking around the yard. Marisol's classmates had all left and most of their cousins had also gone home. The yard, which was filled with life an hour ago, now felt completely barren.

"What are you talking about, it's not going to be dark for another hour. Do you not want to go anymore?" Sapnap tossed the stake to the ground, turning to give Andrew his full attention.

"I do, it's just-" Andrew cut himself off, looking around quickly to make sure no one was in hearing distance. Ben and their dad were also outside, but they were on the opposite side of the yard, packing up the other bounce house.

"I feel like you've been acting *different* since we talked. I feel like you regret telling me you're... you know." Andrew continued, trying to look busy by folding the now deflated structure. "I get that you said it was your first time telling anybody- and *I know* I was being an ass earlier, but you really can trust-"

"Andrew." Sapnap interrupted. Andrew looked up from his task briefly, quickly going back to it. Sapnap grabbed the other side, helping him fold it over. "I don't regret telling you. I also haven't been acting differently since we talked because of that." Sapnap said, taking the now folded tarp and tossing it to the side.

"Then what's wrong?" Andrew pressed. Sapnap was so tired of explaining himself today. Everyone seemed to be asking him the simplest questions that he couldn't bear to answer.

"Karl said he can tell somethings been up with me. He asked me to tell him about why I was so

hesitant to come back. He... He asked me to tell him about when we were kids." Sapnap said blankly, gathering up the few tools on the ground and heading towards the shed. Andrew scrambled to grab the tarp, jogging to catch up to Sapnap.

"You seriously never told him about it?" Andrew asked once he was close enough. Sapnap looked nervously over to his dad and Ben, making sure they weren't close enough to hear.

"I never told *anyone* about it." Sapnap said quietly, opening the door for Andrew. His brother looked at him hesitantly before entering. Sapnap followed, closing the door. He could feel Andrew staring at him while he placed all the tools in their rightful spots.

"I don't want to talk about this here. We can talk on the drive." Sapnap spoke again before Andrew could say anything. His brother looked down for around for a minute, contemplating the offer before agreeing.

The two made their way back into the house, seeing that Ben and their dad were no longer outside. Once they entered the back door, they saw Karl talking with both Jen and their dad, smiles on all their faces.

"Speak of the devil-

"And he shall appear, yeah, yeah." Sapnap finished Karl's sentence. "I don't even want to know what you guys were talking about. Andrew and I are going to head out before it gets dark. Did you, uh, want to come along-"

"No, no, I'm good here! You two have fun though." Karl said with a small laugh once he looked back to Jen, who was trying to hide her own smile. Sapnap was sure they must've been sharing some of the embarrassing stories from his younger years that Karl had asked about earlier.

"We're off then. Text me if you need-" Sapnap halted his pace when Karl grabbed onto his hand, turning around to face him again. He had just told Karl earlier that day that he was okay with affection in front of his family, but now that he could feel everyone's eyes on them, he was already starting to panic.

"Your hat." Karl said with a much softer smile, grabbing Sapnap's signature black baseball cap off the counter beside them. Sapnap instantly regretted looking in his dad's direction, seeing his eyes glued to the sight of their hands being loosely held.

"Right, thanks." Sapnap said quickly, pulling their hands apart to take the hat. Karl's brows lifted in a disappointed surprise, quickly relaxing as he crossed his arms, giving the two a quick wave goodbye.

Sapnap pushed Andrew in the direction of the front door, not slowing down until he approached the car. Sapnap tossed Andrew the keys over the car before sitting down in the passenger seat, his brother entering the car in silence.

Andrew started driving down the driveway, turning towards the nearby town. Sapnap was still holding his hat, fiddling with the brim in his lap.

"So... Do you want to talk about how you made Karl handing you your hat the most awkward experience of my life or do you want to talk about our super fun childhood?" Andrew scoffed, briefly looking over to Sapnap.

"I didn't make it *that*-"

"You did." Andrew interrupted, keeping his eyes on the road this time.

"Whatever." Sapnap mumbled, shifting in his seat uncomfortably. "I guess the thing is, we didn't have the *worst* childhood, not by a long shot, and I get that. Yeah, there are things that I harp on about it and there's probably a lot of stuff that my brain has distorted to being so far from the truth that-"

"Dude." Andrew interrupted, causing Sapnap to look towards him. He wasn't sure if his brother's face was red from the residual heat in the car or if he was upset. "I was there too- I remember all the *same* things you do. You're not exaggerating or, like, gaslighting yourself. Yeah, someone somewhere had it worse, but that doesn't make what happened *here*- what happened to *us*, any less shitty."

Sapnap looked down, his exhausted mind already spinning. He didn't even realize that by downplaying what he went through, it was also invalidating what Andrew experienced as well.

"You're right, sorry." Sapnap sighed. "The reason why I never told Karl about it is because he just wouldn't get it. Like, his childhood was like the one Mari has. Supportive parents, no fighting in the house, unconditional love, just *perfect*. So, if I tell him about mine, he *will* think it was the worst thing in the world. I don't want his pity." Sapnap finished, finally putting his hat on his head.

"I'm sure he-"

"Not to mention, Karl just *loves* everything. He *loves* Texas. He *loves* our house. He *loves* Jen. He *loves* dad. He-" Sapnap cut himself off, feeling an unexpected wave of emotions coming over him.

Andrew looked quickly between Sapnap and the road, clearly concerned once he heard his older brother snuffle.

"Ha, how fucking *stupid* is that? That I feel like I need to protect dad's image- like, I don't want Karl to think poorly of him." Sapnap laughed through the tears threatening to fall, wiping them away before they could leave his eyes.

"It's not-

"No, it *is* stupid, *I'm* stu-"

"Can you let me talk?" Andrew interrupted. Sapnap took the moment of silence to calm down, wiping away the residual tears once he was sure more wouldn't follow.

"I'm listening." Sapnap said under his breath, looking out the window as their small town came into view, more unpleasant feelings arising the closer they got.

"It's not stupid and you're not stupid. It's not about protecting dad, it's about protecting Karl." Andrew said, turning into the parking lot of the one convenience store in town. "Karl has an untainted perspective on our family, on- *everything*. Wanting to keep his perspective a positive one doesn't make you stupid." Andrew finished, wrapping his arm around the passenger seat to back into a parking spot.

"You drove us here." Sapnap said, his statement sounding more like a question as he looked around, like he just came back to reality. "You already know how to drive?" Sapnap asked, turning back to his brother.

"Dude, I'm 16. I already have my license." Andrew said with a small smile creeping onto his face.

"But if pretending that you were teaching me how to drive was the only way I was going to get to drive your Tesla, I was willing to play the part." He laughed, watching Sapnap's confusion turn into a laugh as well.

Chapter End Notes

Next week's chapters are back to back hurt/comfort, fair warning. Also, I just love writing Andrew's character so much. I feel like with Sapnap being a clueless himbo 24/7, the braincells in the family had to end up somewhere.

I will tell the player a story

Chapter Summary

Sapnap explains what his childhood was like to Karl.

Chapter Notes

cw: alcoholism, abuse

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sapnap and Andrew returned home after an hour or so of driving around. Sapnap didn't even realize when, but it finally hit him that his little brother wasn't so little anymore. Hell, Andrew was the one giving him the 'brotherly advice' all day.

Pulling up the driveway, Sapnap instantly noticed Karl was out on the porch, looking over the railing at the flowers. The laugh that had come so freely the last hour felt stuck in his throat.

"He's *basically* your boyfriend, he just wants what's best for you." Andrew laughed when Sapnap audibly scoffed at Karl being referred to as 'basically his boyfriend'.

Once they stepped out of the car, Andrew threw the keys back to Sapnap, jogging up towards the front door. Sapnap rolled his eyes, locking his car over his shoulder, while making his way to the porch.

Karl had already turned to face him, a soft smile on his otherwise apprehensive face. Sapnap did his best to muster up the courage to start the conversation, sitting down on the porch swing and patting the seat beside him. Karl followed, his arms still tightly crossed over his chest.

"You were alright here by yourself?" Sapnap asked, not quite ready to start explaining yet.

"I was hardly by myself." Karl brought a knee to his chest, hugging his leg. "But, yeah. I was fine. Can you say the same about yourself?" Karl asked, looking over to Sapnap. Sapnap furrowed his brows, turning to face Karl.

Sapnap looked down to Karl's lap, realizing that Karl had been keeping his distance. He suddenly remembered the look of disappointment on Karl's face when he pulled apart their hands so abruptly before he left with Andrew.

"I'm sorry about earlier. You deserve an explanation for... everything." Sapnap sighed, leaning forward to pull off his hoodie, holding it out to Karl. "I know you're cold, just take it." Sapnap assured him.

Karl accepted the hoodie, putting it on. He didn't pull his leg back to his chest this time, but he also hadn't initiated any contact between them. Sapnap figured Karl had all the right to be apprehensive about his back and forth reactions to affection and decided he should let Karl dictate when it was

okay again.

Well, that's what he *should* do, but Sapnap couldn't help but lean towards Karl to adjust the sweater's hood, which was folded in on itself. Before he even finished fixing the hood, Karl leaned forward, wrapping his arms around Sapnap's torso.

"Are you okay?" Sapnap whispered, his arms naturally finding their way around Karl's shoulders, relaxing into the hug.

"I will be once I know that you are." Karl mumbled, pushing his face further into Sapnap's neck.

"I'm always okay when I'm with you." Sapnap said a bit more earnestly than he intended. Karl pulled away slowly, his hands trailing across Sapnap's back. "Let me tell you a story." Sapnap said quietly, tucking a hair behind Karl's ear before leaning back in his seat.

Karl looked hesitantly at Sapnap before leaning away, pulling both legs to his chest. He gave Sapnap a small nod before resting his head on his knees.

"Once upon a time-" Sapnap was interrupted by Karl scoffing. "Hey- it's *my* story you asshat." Sapnap laughed, using his feet to begin rocking the swing. "Anyway, once upon a time, there was, uh, me." Sapnap let out a laugh, looking over to see Karl fighting back a smile.

"And then what happened?" Karl said dramatically to mock Sapnap.

At that moment, something clicked for Sapnap. Maybe it was Andrew's advice having a delayed effect on him, or maybe it was the way Karl's hair blew out of his face in the gentle breeze, but he suddenly felt like he could actually open up.

"Home sucked when I was a kid, which is the moral of the story, just thought I'd start with that." Sapnap said with a dry laugh, turning to face the field again once he saw Karl's smile already fading.

"Uh, my parents didn't really love each other- honestly? I don't even think they *liked* each other." Sapnap said through a sigh. "They fought, like, *constantly*. My dad got this house when his parents died, so whenever the fighting got bad, my mom would leave and go to her sister's house. I spent a lot of my childhood taking care of my brothers because of that." Sapnap continued. The strength he felt before was already beginning to fade away.

"My dad, he, uh, he really loved his alcohol- scotch, specifically. Even when I was in elementary school, I'd know how bad my night was going to be based on how empty the bottle on the kitchen counter was. The best days were the ones when the bottle was completely empty and he was already passed out on the couch when I got home."

"Sap." Karl said quietly, extending his hand to Sapnap. He looked down with a small smile, Karl's hand only partially peeking out beyond the cuff of his hoodie's sleeve. Sapnap accepted the gesture, intertwining their fingers.

"Yeah, so, that was the main reason they fought- the drinking. As I got older, the fighting got worse. I actually used to come out here at night and sit on this swing. I'd take one of the home phones with me and crack open the kitchen window, that way I'd know if I had to call the police or not that night."

"How old were you when you started doing that?" Karl asked after a moment of silence.

"About how old Mari is now, eight or nine I think. Yeah, Andrew was definitely old enough to talk

and stuff but Ben was still a toddler." Sapnap answered. "That was my nightly routine. I'd go to Andrew's room and stay with him till he fell asleep- he had a really hard time, um, sleeping alone if they started fighting before he was out. Anyway, then I'd sneak downstairs and out here."

Sapnap wanted to let Karl continue to lead the pace on what he was comfortable with, but he found himself pulling on Karl's arm. Karl pulled their hands apart, laying on his back so his head was resting on Sapnap's thigh. Sapnap reached over to intertwine their fingers again with one hand, the other running through Karl's hair.

"I kind of missed out on a lot when I was growing up. I couldn't really bring friends over here and I didn't go to anyone else's house, since I didn't want to leave Andrew and Ben here alone with them." Sapnap paused when Karl squeezed his hand, stopping to take a deep breath.

"Things got pretty bad when I was about fourteen or fifteen. The fights had started to get more, uh, violent by then. One night, after making sure Ben and Andy were asleep, I snuck out to sit out here like always. I remember my dad was yelling when I heard this crash, and I just *knew* something was different. Not even a second later I hear this blood-curdling scream from my mom. It gets kind of fuzzy after that, but basically what had happened was Andrew came downstairs for whatever reason and when my dad threw a plate at the wall, one of the glass shards flew out and cut him. It's pretty faded now, but that's what the scar through his eyebrow is."

Sapnap paused again, involuntarily flinching from Karl's hand reaching up to graze his face. Karl gave him a second before returning his hand to his cheek, wiping away a tear he didn't realize had fallen.

"So, uh-" Sapnap's voice cracked, more tears slipping out now that he was aware of them. "I guess I had already called 911 at that point. My mom had me stay back at the house with Ben, since the police took my dad away. Andrew ended up getting a few stitches and came back the next day. My dad was friends with the town judge, so he didn't get charged with anything but they mandated he go to AA. Things actually started to get better after that."

A gust of wind blew by, making the wind chimes ring through the otherwise silent night. Karl had brought his hand away from Sapnap's face, now using both his hands to hold Sapnap's.

"My dad actually stopped drinking, the fighting was less frequent, and I kind of started to feel like a normal kid for a bit. But, one day, I came home from school and saw an open bottle on the counter. That was the day my mom left. She didn't say where she was going or why she left. It wasn't until two weeks went by that I realized she wasn't coming back this time." Sapnap finished, closing his eyes and tilting his head back.

"Hey-"

"Things weren't bad again for too long though, because that was around the time when my dad met Jen. She was his AA sponsor and then they fell in love. My dad hasn't drank since he met her, which is great. It's *great*, but I still stayed with Andrew and Ben until they fell asleep each night. It's just *great*, but I *still* sat out on this porch *every* night with the home phone once Jen and Mari moved in. I never had to call 911 again after the night Andrew got hurt, but I guess old habits die hard." Sapnap let out a small forced laugh.

Karl sat up once Sapnap's laugh quickly turned into him crying again. He wrapped his arms around Sapnap's shoulders, letting him cry freely. Sapnap held onto Karl as tightly as he could, letting out every feeling he had been holding in all this time.

Chapter End Notes

The long awaited hurt/comfort is here... well, the comfort will be published on Saturday

But not the truth

Chapter Summary

Karl comforts Sapnap after hearing about his childhood.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It had been a while since Sapnap cried- like, *really* cried. He had shed tears from laughing so hard when on calls with his friends, or at the ending of a couple good movies, but this was different.

He didn't even get the chance to cry like this when he was a child. Sapnap was always too focused on what he could do to protect his brothers, and he knew that crying would only scare them more. He did everything in his power to make their childhoods as least scary as possible, all things considered.

"Hey, shhh. I'm here. I'm here and I'm so, *so*, sorry that you went through that. I'm sorry I wasn't there then, but I'm here now." Karl whispered, finally aware of the damage that had been ingrained in Sapnap's heart this whole time.

"We were just kids back then-"

"I'm not saying I could've done much, but I would've been there for you back then like I am now." Karl cut off Sapnap, leaning further into him. Sapnap adjusted his grip around Karl when he felt how his breathing had become stuttered. Karl instantly refused to pull away, pushing his face against Sapnap's shoulder.

"Let me make up for lost time. You're always the one to hold me when I cry, so let me do this for you. Let me keep you safe for a minute." Karl's words muffled into Sapnap's shirt.

And just like that, another wave of tears fell from Sapnap's eyes. All his life, he was the shoulder to cry on. Neither of his parents were particularly affectionate, he couldn't burden his brothers with his tears, and crying to a friend meant having to explain yourself after. Sapnap had never let himself open up before.

"I just want to take care of you." Karl mumbled again.

"I've always taken care of everyone else. I don't think I know how to let someone take care of me." Sapnap admitted, unwrapping one of his arms from around Karl to wipe his face.

"Well, we've got a whole lifetime to figure it out." Karl leaned back with a soft smile, using the sleeve of Sapnap's hoodie to dry the tears that stained his cheeks. "Let's get you to bed- your *own* bed." Karl emphasized, pulling on Sapnap's hand as he stood up.

Sapnap looked back towards the kitchen window, opened a crack just like back in the day. He turned back around once Karl leaned down in front of him, grabbing his hat off the bench.

"Your family might still be awake." Karl said quietly, also looking through the kitchen window, before putting Sapnap's hat on him. Sapnap closed his eyes as Karl adjusted the hat around his

head, wondering if this was what he planned on doing before he took Andrew out for a drive.

Sapnap adjusted his hat out of habit once he stood, following Karl inside. The TV in the living room was on, the sounds of shooting in a video game coming into earshot once they stepped through the door. Sapnap was relieved once he realized that it was only Andrew, no sign of his dad or Jen in sight.

Andrew turned around briefly once he heard the porch door shut. Nearly as soon as he turned to face the TV again, he whipped his head back around, looking between Karl and Sapnap. It wasn't until Sapnap remembered that he had given Karl his hoodie to wear that he realized what Andrew must've been thinking.

"Let's go." Sapnap said, grabbing Karl's hand and pulling him towards the stairwell once he saw a smile growing on Andrew's face. Karl followed without a word, despite seeing the same devious smile on Andrew's face.

Sapnap and Karl made the same walk through the house that they had the previous night. Although, this time laughter was replaced with tenderly interlocked fingers, squeezing each other in silence. The light in Ben's room was still on and Marisol's color changing night-light was glowing into the dark hallway.

Sapnap entered his room first, the wave of icy air causing goosebumps to crawl up his bare arms. He looked back to Karl with his head tilted to the side, his expression softening the second he saw Karl's look of pride.

"I fixed it! Well, Ben had to show me where the tools were and then Jen actually came up and did most the work, but-"

"You fixed it." Sapnap said with a smile, letting his loose grip on Karl's hand drop, as he walked towards the air conditioner. Although Florida was undoubtedly hotter than Texas this time of year, he still missed the comfort of his and Dream's frosty air conditioning.

"Well, now that your cousins are gone, I'm sure a guest room is free-"

"Stay in here tonight... with me." Sapnap turned, probably a slight look of panic on his face. Karl's eyebrows raised, soon relaxing as he stepped forward, holding his hand in Sapnap's again.

"Whatever you want." His words were soft and delicate, much like the hand holding onto Sapnap's. Karl reached up with his other hand, pulling off Sapnap's hat and tossing it onto the desk. Before he could react, Karl had started to run his fingers through Sapnap's hair, pushing a few overgrown curls back.

"You know I love you, right?" Karl asked, his eyes bouncing around Sapnap's features as he continued to trail his hand through his hair.

"Y-, uh, yeah?" Sapnap stuttered, waiting for Karl's eyes to meet his.

"Can you take a shower before we get in bed. You smell like sweat." Karl let out a quick laugh, dramatically wiping the hand that was in his hair on Sapnap's shirt.

"Oh, *fuck you*." Sapnap laughed. He pulled Karl to his chest, shaking his head like a wet dog in Karl's face. "You don't like this? Huh? What was that you said?" Sapnap teased, continuing to hold Karl tightly, despite his desperate effort to get away.

"Sap- Oh my god! *Stop!*" Karl pleaded, a laugh embedded in his words. "You smell, like, so bad."

Karl's laugh slowed down once Sapnap stopped shaking his head. The two swayed a bit, still pressed chest to chest.

Sapnap's smile faded with his laugh as he and Karl finally found themselves standing completely still in one another's arms, their proximity too close to mean nothing. The weighted silence in the room was begging for answers.

Is this too close? Are his eyes drawn to my lips too? How is he feeling? What does he truly mean when he says 'I love you'?

Sapnap let go, taking a step back. Karl instantly stepped back as well, looking to the ground in a way that almost seemed flustered.

"I'm going to go take that shower." Sapnap said quietly, walking backwards towards his bathroom, reaching out to grab a towel off the back of his desk chair on his way. Sapnap leaned his back against the bathroom door once it was shut, holding a hand to his chest.

His heart was pounding out of his chest. Something about that hug, about the way Karl held him, about how their relationship seemed to have had a shift over the last 36 hours. Sapnap couldn't help but wonder if he was imagining it all- if Karl was just acting like his normal self and he was the one distorting things.

But the way he *looked* at him. How Karl's eyes seemed to be holding something deeper than friendship in their gaze. It seemed like in every other timeline, that would've been where they kissed- where Sapnap pulled Karl closer instead of stepping away.

"You're losing it, Nick." Sapnap mumbled to himself, finally peeling his back off the door and making his way to the shower. The water turned on with a sputtering squeak. Sapnap sighed, realizing in his haste he didn't even remember to grab his toiletries.

Sapnap's hand paused just before it reached the handle, the muffled sound of Karl talking echoing through the room. He wasn't able to make out much, so he tried pressing his ear against the door.

"Thanks Jen, I'll bring my stuff down in a bit." Sapnap leaned back, opening the bathroom door the second he heard his bedroom door close.

"What was that about?" Sapnap asked, instantly heading over to his suitcase to grab his shower things, to not seem like he was eavesdropping on purpose.

"Oh, that was Jen. She, uh, she wanted to let me know she put some clean bedding in one of the guest rooms for me." Karl said quietly, looking between Sapnap and his bed. Sapnap also looked over to his unmade bed, only the sound of his shower running in the background between them.

"I'd, uh, rather stay in here tonight. But only if you're okay with-"

"I want you to stay." Sapnap cut Karl off with a smile, grabbing his bag and heading back into the bathroom.

Chapter End Notes

Something much more lighthearted after Wednesday's heavy chapter

A story that contains the truth safely

Chapter Summary

Karl continues to comfort Sapnap as they get ready to spend the night together.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Sapnap exited the steaming bathroom, embracing the clash in temperatures as he reentered his room. He almost panicked when he didn't see Karl, until his eyes landed on the bed. Karl was completely wrapped in the duvet, his face barely sticking out.

Sapnap walked up to the bed, sitting on the edge in his towel. The residual water across his skin felt like ice the closer he got to the air conditioner.

"You tell me to shower because I stink, then you get in bed wearing the same hoodie I was sweating in?" Sapnap asked, brushing a few of Karl's hairs out of his face.

"Cold beggars can't be choosers." Karl mumbled, shifting under the covers to pull out one of his arms. He ran his hand up Sapnap's forearm, instantly pulling it away with a dramatic frown that made Sapnap laugh.

"What?" Sapnap asked, grabbing onto Karl's hand and forcing their fingers to intertwine, despite Karl's refusal.

"You're cold *and* wet." Karl grumbled, finally giving up on trying to pry apart their hands. "And naked?" Karl continued, straining his neck to lean up enough to see Sapnap was just in a towel.

"I sleep naked when I'm home. Keeps my family from barging into my room in the morning." Sapnap said with a flat affect, trying his best to hold off laughing until he could see Karl's reaction.

"Oh, okay. Makes sense, I guess." Karl shrugged, laying his head back down and closing his eyes.

"You- *What?*!" Sapnap let out an abrupt laugh, causing Karl to squint up at him. "I was just messing with you. I wouldn't-... you really thought-... and with you *with* me?" Sapnap failed to finish any of his sentences, letting their hands slide apart as he headed towards his suitcase with a laugh.

"Live your life, man." Karl sighed, rolling away from Sapnap. Sapnap was still laughing to himself as he got dressed, throwing on the first pair of sweatpants and t-shirt he saw. He pulled back the bedding, uncovering Karl.

"Okay, you said I had to shower before bed. I can say you need to change out of that hoodie and your, oh my god, *jeans*." Sapnap sighed, looking down to see Karl wearing the exact same outfit he had on all day.

"Why can't you just love me for who I am?" Karl whined, trying to tug on the blanket. Sapnap refused, leaning down to pull Karl to the edge of the bed.

"Come on princess, time to put on your nightgown." Sapnap teased, pulling Karl to an upright position. Karl remained limp in his arms, only occasionally letting out a groan in rebuttal. After a moment of silence, Karl lifted his head to give Sapnap a glare.

"You're awful." Karl retorted, finally standing and heading towards his suitcase.

"You love me." Sapnap scoffed, crawling into bed.

"I can say you're awful and still love you at the same time." Karl shrugged. Sapnap's eyes widened as soon as Karl pulled off his shirt and hoodie. Regardless of how many times Sapnap had seen Karl undress, it was still a sight to behold every time.

With the cover of the dark room, Sapnap knew his wandering eyes were safe from being caught. He almost felt disappointed when Karl finally slid into a fresh t-shirt. Just as Karl started unbuttoning his pants, Sapnap turned around to face the wall- got to maintain *some* boundaries at least.

"Stop hogging the covers." Karl complained, crawling into bed.

A smile grew on Sapnap's face as soon as Karl wrapped his arms around his waist, pushing his face between his shoulder blades.

"I thought I was cold and wet?" Sapnap mockingly asked, turning around to pull Karl to his chest. Karl mimicked Sapnap's question, gladly pulling himself closer to Sapnap. Sapnap ran his hands slowly up and down Karl's back.

"Thanks for being there for me." Sapnap said quietly, finally closing his eyes. Karl started to stir in the bed, causing Sapnap's hand to slide from his back to his waist as he leaned away.

"Why do you keep doing that? Thanking me all the time." Karl asked. Sapnap kept his eyes closed until Karl's hand brushed against his face, pushing his damp hair behind his ear. With the light shining in from the full moon, Karl's features were gently lit, his eyes looking over to Sapnap with nothing but sincerity.

"You've done a lot for me the last few days." Sapnap answered in a whisper, sliding his hand across Karl's forearm until their fingers met. "This is probably the first time I've not wanted to leave Texas, because that means leaving you." Sapnap's hand froze the second the words passed through his lips.

The way Karl was looking at him in silence, his face painfully still, made Sapnap's anxiety grow. He had been pushing limits and testing boundaries all evening- it was about time something backfired.

Karl held him earlier to comfort him as a *friend*. Karl was only staying with him tonight because he asked him to. Everything Karl had done this trip was to be a good friend, and Sapnap seemed to have let that detail slip his mind. Sapnap pulled his hand away from Karl's, taking in a sharp inhale of air, attempting to roll away from Karl.

"Don't do that." Karl said quietly, placing his hand more firmly on the side of Sapnap's face, preventing him from looking away. "Don't withdraw from me again." Karl finished. Now it was Sapnap's turn to stare blankly, searching for meaning in Karl's eyes.

"Withdraw?" He questioned, resting his head back down on the pillow. Karl's hand laid more gently on his face, his thumb rubbing against Sapnap's heated cheek.

"You open up and then you pull away. It's like you try to leave before anyone can leave you. I'm not going anywhere. You know that, right?" Karl explained, his hand now laying still on Sapnap's face. Sapnap wanted to pull Karl's hand away, maybe saving a shred of his dignity, seeing that he was sure his face must've been burning to the touch.

"Karl-" Sapnap started, closing his eyes. He was actively fighting his every urge to turn away, to roll over, to resort to all the tactics he normally would when Karl would make him flustered.

Maybe Karl was right though. Was Sapnap's instinct to withdraw based on the fear of Karl recognizing his feelings for him, or was it deeper than that? Was there anyone in Sapnap's life who he never pulled away from?

"Tell me what you're thinking." Karl urged quietly. Sapnap could feel Karl's eyes scanning over his face without even opening his eyes.

"I can't." Sapnap answered, knowing every thought he was having ended with him leaning forward and connecting their lips.

"Tell me anyway." Karl insisted, returning his hand to Sapnap's hair, gently running his fingers through tangled curls.

Sapnap could feel his breathing becoming more relaxed, his body's exhaustion from the day full of activity beginning to take over. He didn't have the mental or physical strength to fight it anymore.

"I'm thinking... about how much I love you." Sapnap mumbled, unsure if he had already fallen asleep or not. The soothing repetitive motion of Karl's short nails gently scratching his scalp was pushing him closer to sleep by the second.

"Why did you say you couldn't tell me that?" Karl asked in a whisper, clearly picking up that Sapnap was nearly asleep.

"Because it's not what you think." Sapnap admitted, his words mumbled. He slid his hand from Karl's waist to around his back again, pulling him in closer. Sapnap was completely asleep before he could even hear Karl's response.

Chapter End Notes

Two chapters in a day because this is a continuation of the hurt/comfort arc and it's also a shorter chapter <3

A cage of words

Chapter Summary

Sapnap wakes up to find Karl being abnormally distant from him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Rays of sunlight filtered through the old blinds in Sapnap's room, gracing his face. His eyelashes fluttered open in waves of long slow blinks, adjusting to the light of day. Sapnap stretched his arms over his head, finding himself reaching out for something his mind hadn't even caught up to yet.

It was practically disorienting how light he felt without the weight of Karl laying across him, the way his limbs could move freely without bumping into anyone else. Sapnap began rubbing his eyes, trying to make himself fully wake up.

"Karl?" Sapnap's voice cracked as he spoke for the first time, a yawn soon following his simple question.

"It lives." Karl answered from across the room. Sapnap opened his eyes again, allowing them to focus on where he heard Karl's voice, golden light from the open window shining in on him. Karl could turn any time of day to a golden hour.

Karl was standing in front of one of the shelves on his wall, quickly setting down a small trinket he had in his hand. Sapnap looked over the shelf, seeing old sports trophies, mementos, and pictures of him and the people he called friends in high school. It truly was a shelf of old junk.

"Unfortunately." Sapnap said through another yawn, holding a hand in the air for Karl. A few seconds went by and Sapnap didn't hear Karl start walking towards him. He opened his eyes again with his brows knit together, seeing Karl frozen in place, holding both his arms around his chest tightly.

"What's wrong?" Sapnap asked, retreating his hand and opting to sit up in the bed instead. Karl looked around the room, walking over to the edge of the bed in silence. Sapnap stared up at Karl, grabbing onto Karl's wrist when he tried running his fingers through Sapnap's bed head.

"Nothing's wrong." Karl said with a meek smile, sliding his wrist out of Sapnap's grasp and returning his hands to his side.

Sapnap's eyes were searching over Karl's face, trying desperately to find a subliminal message. Sapnap involuntarily flinched away from Karl when he remembered his last words before he fell asleep.

"Because it's not what you think."

"Shit." Sapnap whispered under his breath, moving back on the bed and away from Karl. To his surprise, Karl followed his every move, also getting on the bed.

"I wasn't sure if you were actually awake, I'm sorry." Karl instantly began apologizing, grabbing

onto Sapnap's hand. Sapnap leaned away, his tired mind only becoming increasingly confused by the second.

"You're not... freaked out?" Sapnap asked, his heart beating out of his chest. Karl shook his head, grabbing onto Sapnap's other hand as well.

"I mean, I was kind of surprised, seeing that it came out of nowhere. But why would I be freaked out? I was more worried that *you'd* be freaking out." Karl questioned. Silence fell over the two, each staring at the other with confusion and uncertainty.

"Wait- what are *you* talking about?" Sapnap asked, pulling his hands back. Karl let one go but held onto the other.

"I'm talking about your dad coming into your room this morning. What are *you* talking-"

"He *what*?" Sapnap flinched just hearing the words, looking around his room in a panic, as if something could give him a sign of whether or not it was true.

"It's okay, really. He just came in for, like, not even a minute!" Karl tried to assure Sapnap. Nothing seemed to calm Sapnap down until Karl placed a hand on his cheek, urging him to look at him.

"What did he want? What did he *see*?" Sapnap asked, despite his fear of the answer.

"He just, uh, said to come find him when you woke up. I guess he made plans for us tonight." Karl answered, looking away while he spoke.

"And?" Sapnap pressed, knowing Karl only refused eye contact when he had something he was avoiding saying.

"And... I finally experienced the look your dad gives that's been making you withdraw from me. Won't lie, it kind of sucked." Karl answered with a dry and obviously fake laugh. Karl was looking at Sapnap with something he wasn't used to seeing in his eyes. Karl looked *ashamed*. Like he felt embarrassed or guilty by what Sapnap's dad must've seen.

"The look..." Sapnap started, reaching his other hand back out to Karl. Karl stared at his hand for a second before accepting, their fingers intertwining. "The look *sucks*. It makes you feel small, like you're a disappointment or something. The look doesn't mean *shit* though, okay? Don't let his judgment stop you from being yourself. I know how long it took you to get to this place in your life, don't let my dad make you take a step backwards."

Karl had kept his face down until Sapnap pulled apart their hands, bringing one hand to Karl's chin, guiding him to look at him. Karl's nose and cheeks were red, his eyes a bit bloodshot.

"Oh, Karl." Sapnap sighed, pulling Karl to his chest. Karl instantly let out a few soft cries, his arms wrapping tightly around Sapnap's torso. Sapnap, although he still had a knee jerk reaction to his dad's unforgiving gaze, had become at least somewhat immune to it.

"Sorry, it's just, after hearing about everything when you were a kid last night and then seeing that *look*-" Karl paused, taking a breath. "It was such a nice morning too." Karl's words were muffled into Sapnap's shoulder. Sapnap could feel the tears already pricking in the corners of his own eyes. He had held Karl while he cried too many times to count, but he had never felt so guilty- so *responsible* for it before.

"Tell me about the nice morning." Sapnap said in a whisper, one hand rubbing circles on Karl's back, the other stroking his hair.

"I woke up first, like always." Karl started, causing Sapnap to let out a quick laugh. It was true, Sapnap did have a tendency to oversleep. "You were like, *dead*-" Karl let out a laugh himself, turning his face to the side. "And you were doing the thing I like, where you hug me from behind. Clinging to me like a baby koala." Karl laughed a bit more.

"Psh, I don't sleep like that." Sapnap rolled his eyes, tilting his head to the side so he could see Karl's face again. Karl's tears had dried for the most part, his face only having a residual amount of pink left on it.

"You did this morning. I was scrolling on my phone and we were just, *laying together*, that was it. That was what made it such a good morning." Karl let out a deep breath, closing his eyes. Sapnap's hand froze on Karl's back for a moment before continuing to rub circles on it.

If waking up together was all Karl needed to have a good start to his day, Sapnap would have no problem making sure he had a good morning *every* morning for the rest of his life.

"We can still make today a good day." Sapnap said with a smile, continuing to run a hand through Karl's hair. "Don't let Old Saint Nick get to you." Sapnap laughed a bit.

"Santa Clause?" Karl instantly questioned, looking up to Sapnap in bewilderment.

"Saint Nick- my dad? My brothers and I used to call him 'Old Saint Nick' when we were kids, you know- because his name is Nick and he had a big 'beer-belly' like Santa." Sapnap explained, his hand slowing down in Karl's hair.

"Honestly, I didn't even know your dad's name until just now." Karl laughed. "I also didn't know you were named after him." Karl admitted, pushing his face into Sapnap's chest in a way that seemed embarrassed.

"There are *lots* of things you don't know about me." Sapnap teased, leaning away so Karl would be forced to stop hiding his face. Karl looked up with a smile, it soon fading away as his eyes flicked rapidly between Sapnap's.

"Wait- before. You were freaking out but you didn't know about your dad walking in, what were-"

"Jen said I had to force you guys to come to lunch since you missed- *oh*." Andrew announced, pushing open the door to Sapnap's room, his eyes instantly landing on the two sitting in bed, wrapped in each other's arms. "Shit, uh-" Andrew stammered, walking backwards towards the door.

"Andy, it's not-"

"Lunch is ready whenever, you're uh, *done*." Andrew called out over his shoulder, already descending the smaller staircase that led to Sapnap's room.

Sapnap looked down to Karl, doing his best to smile through the embarrassment, knowing his cheeks were glowing brighter than the mid afternoon sun. Karl had been sitting directly in front of him, both his hands resting on Sapnap's chest, while Sapnap had one arm wrapped around Karl's waist and the other frozen in his hair.

Yeah, explaining his way out of this one to Andrew was going to be a fun conversation.

"Let's go eat." Sapnap sighed, finishing one final pass through Karl's hair before pulling away from him.

Chapter End Notes

I'm going to start uploading three times a week (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) <3
This might be temporary, depending on if I keep writing at the pace I am.

Give it a body, again

Chapter Summary

Another look into Karl's perspective

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Karl had always known that physical touch was important to him. It was how he wordlessly told people he loved them, he cared about them, he was thinking about them. He also felt the best when that was how people showed love to him.

He felt a sense of pride about how he was able to convert even his most conservative friends into people who appreciated affection. Whether it was hugs, holding hands, an arm around their shoulder, *anything*- Karl was happy seeing others feel loved the way he did.

When it came to Sapnap, Karl felt like he might've finally met a person he couldn't convert. Sapnap was potentially the most standoffish and stiff friend he had met in person. Sapnap's whole body would go rigid every time Karl even came near him- like he was tensing up in preparation for whatever Karl had planned.

It was Sapnap's last night in North Carolina on his very first trip up when Karl was just about to throw in the towel, to finally admit defeat, and accept that maybe some people just don't like physical touch.

But that was when it happened.

Karl and Sapnap were sitting in his living room, watching some random cartoon. Karl looked over to see Sapnap nearly asleep on the other side of the couch, his arms wrapped tightly around himself.

Karl crawled across the couch as stealthily as he could, doing his best to not wake Sapnap. He draped the blanket he had been using over Sapnap's lap, reaching over his chest to adjust the blanket.

Sapnap must've felt Karl leaning over him, because he reached up and hooked one arm around Karl's waist. Karl didn't even have time to react, finding himself hovering his hands in the air to avoid touching Sapnap.

"We can share." Sapnap mumbled through a yawn, using his free hand to open the blanket for Karl, inviting him to lay down with him. Karl didn't really have much of a choice but to accept, seeing that Sapnap's arm was still weighing heavily around his waist- and it didn't seem like he would be letting go anytime soon.

As soon as Karl let himself relax into the embrace, Sapnap was completely wrapped around him, back to being fully asleep in less than a minute. Ever since then, Sapnap had only seemed to become more comfortable with affection around Karl.

Karl even felt a bit special, considering that Sapnap had continued to be just as cold shouldered to

the rest of their friends.

Now, present day, Karl was pressing his hands against Sapnap's chest, one of Sapnap's arms holding him firmly around the waist and the other running through his hair. Karl felt like there was no other place in the world he would rather be.

So you can imagine Karl's disappointment when Sapnap pulled away completely, getting out of the bed altogether after Andrew's abrupt intrusion.

"Did you at least go down and get some juice earlier?" Sapnap asked over his shoulder, changing out of his pajamas. Karl turned around on the bed, letting his legs dangle off the edge.

"Hey, I didn't wake up long before you did." Karl shrugged, trying to hide his laugh as Sapnap dug through his suitcase, making a complete mess out of everything. Sapnap had always been so neat, organized, and orderly- *except* when it came to traveling.

"Well, you're definitely eating lunch, so no complaining if you get a stomach ache." Sapnap scoffed, finally standing up with the shirt he had been searching for. Sapnap quickly pulled it over his head, making his wild bed head stick up even more. "You just gonna sit there?" Sapnap asked.

"I'm thinking." Karl said quietly, looking over Sapnap's face. Karl wanted nothing more than to run his fingers through Sapnap's hair until it looked presentable. But other than that, Karl had also been thinking about their morning.

He was thinking about how just the *thought* of his dad walking in had Sapnap in a near state of panic, yet when his brother *actually* walked in, he was completely fine- even let out a small laugh about it.

"Well think and walk at the same time, moron." Sapnap smiled, walking over to the bed, pulling Karl up to stand. Karl let out a series of fake groans, making Sapnap's job of helping him up much harder than it needed to be.

"Wait a sec." Karl insisted, finally getting the chance to fix Sapnap's hair. Sapnap was making a bunch of faces at Karl, but he couldn't help but smile.

The same way he had helped Sapnap overcome his apprehension to affection, Sapnap had helped him get over his issues with touching hair. Although, he had seemed to only be used to it when it came to Sapnap- thinking about touching anyone else's hair or having someone other than Sapnap touch his still sounded like a nightmare.

"There, now you look as handsome as ever." Karl said with a smile, tucking the last stray curl behind Sapnap's ear. Sapnap turned away with a scoff, immediately heading to the bedroom door.

There were some moments like this where Karl wondered if Sapnap was still a bit shy. He had definitely gotten used to physical affection, but compliments still seemed to make him flustered. Even so, Karl loved complimenting Sapnap- seeing the blush Sapnap always tried to hide was probably his favorite part.

Karl followed closely behind Sapnap, reaching out and grabbing onto his hand. Sapnap instantly shook him off with a laugh.

"What is with you today?" Sapnap asked once he got to the base of the stairs, turning to face Karl again. Karl was still up a step, making him even taller than Sapnap.

"What, I can't love you?" Karl laughed, resting his arms on Sapnap's shoulders. Just like when they

were in the bedroom, Sapnap scoffed and turned away from him again, heading down the hall.

"You can love me while keeping your hands to *yourself*." Sapnap said over his shoulder. Even when dismissing Karl, the smile in his voice was enough confirmation for Karl to know that he was enjoying the extra attention.

Despite all the challenging situations that had happened during their stay so far- the awkward family encounters, the unloading of childhood trauma, the unspoken shift in their dynamic- Karl was still grateful to be there.

He was grateful to be a shoulder for Sapnap to lean on. He was grateful that he could get to know Sapnap better. And, of course, he was simply grateful for the chance to just spend time with him again.

Walking a few steps behind Sapnap, a smile grew on Karl's face every time Sapnap turned around and rolled his eyes when he would catch Karl staring at him.

Karl loved looking at Sapnap. He loved the way his hair would curl up on the sides of his hat, making it look like he had little horns. He loved watching when Sapnap would laugh- like *genuinely* laugh. He loved the way Sapnap tried his hardest to blow off compliments, but would always have a faint smile for the rest of their conversation.

There was no doubt in Karl's mind that he thought Sapnap was an attractive person. It was just an aesthetic thing though, of course. He could just *appreciate* Sapnap's beauty, even if that meant he wasn't always sure why his eyes were drawn to Sapnap in any room he entered.

Karl was still watching Sapnap when they entered the kitchen, his train of thought only being brought back to reality when Sapnap elbowed Andrew in the ribs. Andrew let out a laugh and a groan at the same time. Karl was only able to see Sapnap's face for a second before he put his hat on.

Sapnap's face was completely red. Maybe he was more embarrassed about Andrew walking in on them earlier than he was letting on.

"Food. *Eat*." Sapnap emphasized, setting down a plate on the counter, pointing between Karl and his lunch. Karl rolled his eyes, pulling out one of the bar stools and sitting at it. Sapnap stared at him until Karl took a bite of the sandwich, stepping away with a smile after ruffling Karl's hair.

"I bet you must be *so* excited for tonight." Andrew turned to Karl, a less than friendly smile on his face, as he sat in the seat directly next to him. Karl instantly looked to Sapnap, only to find him equally as confused.

"What's tonight?" Karl asked after Sapnap shrugged, taking another bite of his sandwich.

"You didn't tell him?" Andrew continued, turning to Sapnap. Sapnap's confusion grew until his face fell, freezing mid bite.

"No-"

"*Yes!*" Andrew laughed, looking back to Karl. "Tonight, we're taking Karl to his first rodeo." Andrew beamed, his smile only growing as the look of horror set in on Karl's face.

jsdkaldj okay so we are entering the arc that inspired me to write this whole book in the first place. get ready for yeehaw cowboy arc (i'm sorry in advance)

Use its name

Chapter Summary

Karl and Sapnap have lunch with his family

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Sapnap's heart felt like it had fallen on the floor and no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't seem to pick it up. One word that took him back as far as a decade-

Rodeo.

"No, *no*, we are not-"

"Dad already got the tickets." Andrew interrupted, looking especially smug. Sapnap felt like he and Andrew had been making a lot of progress, but at the end of the day, an annoying little brother is an *annoying* little brother.

"Sap, it's fine. Maybe a rodeo will be fun?" Karl interjected quietly, trying to maintain his optimism. Sapnap felt guilty just seeing the painfully fake smile on Karl's face.

"That's the spirit." Sapnap's dad announced, walking in from the porch. He paused by the sink, kissing the side of Jen's head before leaning against the counter. Sapnap wasn't sure if he was the only one who felt it, but it seemed like the entire mood of the room shifted.

First, he had Andrew commenting about how Karl was looking at him when they first walked into the kitchen, now the news of a fucking rodeo of all things.

"A rodeo? Really, dad?" Sapnap sighed, setting down his plate. He felt like a hypocrite, telling Karl he needed to eat, meanwhile he was nauseous just thinking about taking another bite.

"Come on, Nick. You haven't gone to a rodeo since Ben was in diapers. It'll be a good time." His dad encouraged, wrapping an arm around Jen's waist. The way that his dad looked over to Jen seemed eerily familiar to how Karl looked at him.

"Karl looks at you the way dad looks at Jen. That's how I know what it looks like when you stare at a person you're in love with."

God, Andrew was getting in his head.

His dad also wasn't wrong, Sapnap hadn't gone to a rodeo since before his mom left. As much as he hated to admit it, he actually only had good memories of going to rodeos.

Those were the days when his parents wouldn't fight, where he didn't feel like he needed to protect his brothers, where he could finally feel like a kid.

Maybe that was why he couldn't fathom the thought of going back to one- if anything went wrong, his *one* untainted memory of Texas would be ruined.

"Can't let Karl visit Texas for the first time and not show him how we do things around here, now can we?" Jen joined the conversation, turning around and leaning against the counter next to Sapnap's dad. "Don't worry, I'm not letting him go. It'd just be you two and your brothers." Jen said with a smile, elbowing Sapnap's dad.

Sapnap looked over to Karl, his face only somewhat relieved. Maybe he could bribe his brothers to let them go somewhere else-

"We're expecting pictures. *Lots* of pictures." Jen continued, looking at Sapnap like she was reading his mind.

"Of course you are." Sapnap grumbled, grabbing onto the bottom of Andrew's seat and pulling it away from Karl, making room for himself to sit between them.

"Wow, you really are possessive." Andrew whispered, leaning over to Sapnap. Sapnap turned his head slowly in Andrew's direction, the smile on Andrew's face only growing once he saw how his older brother looked simultaneously livid and flustered.

"I won't hesitate to throw you in with the bulls." Sapnap warned in a mutter under his breath, hitting Andrew on the side of his head. Andrew winced, holding the spot where Sapnap hit him. Andrew and Sapnap looked away from each other in unison, both of their gazes landing on their parents' confused faces.

"There was a bug on his head." Sapnap said with a tight smile, looking back to Andrew with a glare.

"Yeah. Thanks, man." Andrew answered begrudgingly, taking a bite of his sandwich without another word. Their dad and Jen exchanged glances before shrugging it off.

"Eat." Sapnap said after turning to Karl, seeing his untouched plate. Karl continued to stare at Sapnap, clearly hoping to be let in on whatever had just happened. "Please?" Sapnap said through a sigh, resting his hand on Karl's thigh under the table.

Karl's eyes flicked down to Sapnap's hand and then over to his parents, who were talking about something completely unrelated now. Karl laid his hand over Sapnap's, picking up a chip with his other hand and eating it.

Sapnap finally felt a bit more relaxed, picking up his own sandwich to begin eating again. The rest of lunch went by quickly, his dad and Jen both stepped out to check on Marisol and Ben, who were playing in the yard.

"So, did you pack any flannels, Karl?" Andrew asked with a laugh, standing from the counter to clear his plate. Karl looked up from his phone and over to Sapnap, waiting for him to explain if the question was a joke or not.

"What you're wearing is fine." Sapnap said reassuringly, looking over Karl's outfit. He had on a pair of black ripped jeans and a sweater that had sheep on it.

"No it's-"

"It's *fine*." Sapnap interrupted Andrew, unintentionally squeezing Karl's thigh. Karl jumped, more so as an involuntary reaction- not from pain. Sapnap instantly pulled his hand away, looking at Karl with wide eyes.

"I'm fine, just startled me." Karl said quietly, reaching over and grabbing Sapnap's hand again,

bringing it back to his thigh. Sapnap rubbed his thumb against Karl's fingers for a second before looking back to Andrew, seeing his eyes glued to their not-so-hidden hands. From where he was standing, he must've seen everything.

"All done?" Sapnap asked quickly, already grabbing his and Karl's plates off the counter. He bumped his shoulder against Andrew's as he walked by, nodding his head towards the stairs. Andrew furrowed his brows, looking towards Karl quickly before silently heading up the stairwell.

"Thanks, Nick." Karl said, going back to his phone. Sapnap froze, turning around with both plates still in his hands.

"What?" He asked after a moment of silence, setting the plates back down on the counter. Karl looked up from his phone briefly, quickly going back to scrolling.

"I just said thanks, you know, for taking care of the dish-"

"Why'd you call me Nick?" Sapnap interrupted, knowing that Karl wasn't going to address it if he didn't explicitly ask. Karl looked up again, locking his phone and setting it on the counter this time.

"I don't know." Karl shrugged, leaning back in his chair. "Your family calls you Nick, being the only one calling you Sapnap is weird." Karl had one arm crossed over his chest, the other rubbing the back of his neck.

"You calling me Nick is what's weird." Sapnap countered, walking back over so he was standing in front of Karl. "You sure everything's alright? If it's about the rodeo, I can bribe Ben and Andy to-"

"What did Andrew say to you that made you hit him?" Karl asked, turning in his chair to face Sapnap. Karl was looking up to him with longing in his eyes, like they were searching for answers.

He wanted to tell Karl anything but the truth, but whenever Karl looked at him like *that*, Sapnap was completely at his mercy.

"He called me possessive... of you." Sapnap answered.

"Oh." Karl broke his gaze, leaning back in his chair and picking up his phone again.

"What do you mean, 'oh'?" Sapnap asked, taking Karl's phone out of his hand and setting it back on the table. Karl looked up to Sapnap like he was the one acting strange in the situation.

"What? You *are* possessive of me. I was assuming he said something bad." Karl shrugged, shooing Sapnap's hand away from his phone. Sapnap refused, picking up the phone and putting it in his pocket.

"I am *not*!" Sapnap exclaimed with a laugh.

"Pfft. Yeah and I'm the queen of England." Karl scoffed, reaching out for Sapnap's pocket. "It's not a bad thing, Nick-"

"Stop calling me that, oh my god." Sapnap interrupted, swatting away Karl's hand, which was still fighting to get his phone back.

"If I go back to calling you Sap, can I get my phone back?" Karl asked with an eyeroll.

"Only if you also admit that I am *not* possessive." Sapnap crossed his arms, fighting back a smile.

"Sap... I'm not going to lie to your face." Karl couldn't hold back his own smile anymore, a laugh

quickly following. Sapnap watched as Karl lifted a hand to cover his mouth while he laughed. He hated when Karl did that, it always took all his strength to not pull Karl's hand away so he could see his full smile.

"You're a moron." Sapnap said while rolling his eyes, setting Karl's phone back on the counter, and heading back into the kitchen to finish clearing the dishes.

Chapter End Notes

just a little domestic fluff as a peace offering since i'm about to annoy the hell out of you all with my yeehaw arc :)

Sapnap. Player of games

Chapter Summary

Andrew plants an idea in Sapnap's head that he can't seem to shake off.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Sapnap told Karl he was going to grab his phone from his room, leaving him alone in the kitchen. As Sapnap was walking through the hallway, he was stopped by Andrew whipping open his door.

"It's been, like, 15 minutes. What took you so long?" Andrew asked, leaning against his door frame. Sapnap turned on his heels, facing Andrew with a raised eyebrow. "You wanted me to go upstairs so you could tell me something. What was it?" Andrew continued, waving around one of his hands.

"I told you to go upstairs because you were being *annoying*, not because I had anything to say to you." Sapnap laughed, leaning against the wall. Andrew rolled his eyes, shaking his head.

"So you fessed up, right? First you're holding him in bed then *that*, come on." Andrew asked, making a face as he grabbed his own thigh, referencing how Sapnap had been holding Karl's thigh throughout lunch.

"*No*, and I'm not going to. Like I said, that's just how Karl is. Physical touch is his love language or whatever, it makes him happy when I do stuff like that." Sapnap shrugged, leaning to get a view of the staircase, making sure Karl wasn't eavesdropping.

"Isn't that kind of... Nevermind. Uh, you should really let Karl borrow a flannel, or at least a hoodie for-"

"Isn't it kind of *what*?" Sapnap interrupted, furrowing his brows as he looked back to his brother. Andrew seemed noticeably uncomfortable, like he had clearly regretted saying anything at all.

"Nothing-"

"Bullshit, what were you going to say?" Sapnap asked again, his gaze narrowing in on Andrew.

"*Fine*, I don't know, isn't that kind of... gross? Isn't he only comfortable with being so touchy with you because he doesn't know you're... you know. If he knew how you *felt*, do you think he would still be okay with all that?" Andrew asked, lowering his voice to a near whisper.

Sapnap had a million thoughts running through his head. He wanted to tell Andrew that he was an idiot and *of course* Karl would still be just as comfortable with him if he knew he was gay.

But there was always the lingering uncertainty of *what if* he wasn't okay with it. *What if* he would be grossed out. *What if* he felt like this was a breach in his trust.

"Shit, that came out wrong. I just-"

"No, it came out perfectly clear." Sapnap said, walking towards his room like he intended to all along.

"Nick, come on." Andrew called out. Sapnap ignored him, entering the small stairwell that led to his room. This day had already been so overwhelming, giving him emotional whiplash at every turn, and it was just beginning.

Sapnap walked into his room, closing the door behind him, and collapsing into his bed. Just as he closed his eyes, his phone began to ring. Sapnap sighed, looking over to see Dream calling him.

"Hey." Sapnap said flatly, putting the call on speaker and resting his phone on his chest.

"Uh oh. What's wrong?" Dream asked instantly. Normally Sapnap would find Dream's all-knowing instincts to be endearing, but he had absolutely no desire to talk about what was upsetting him. He wouldn't even know where to start.

"Nothing, just, my brother is giving me a hard time about Karl being here." Sapnap did his best to summarize the situation in the shortest way possible.

"Andrew or Ben? About Karl being where?" Dream asked basically as soon as Sapnap finished his sentence.

"Andrew, it's *always* Andrew." Sapnap sighed. "And about Karl being here, like in Texas with me." Sapnap explained, rubbing his forehead.

"What do you mean Karl is *with you* in Texas?" Dream asked again.

"Oh, shit, I totally forgot to tell you about that. Karl, uh, surprised me. He was waiting for me when I got here. I guess he flew in the afternoon I started my drive. To be honest, I don't think I would have survived the last two days without him." Sapnap admitted, closing his eyes.

The faint smile on his face that was just beginning to grow faded away as he recalled what Andrew brought to his attention. The guilt was beginning to set in for Sapnap, as he thought about how he had been lying to Karl this whole time.

"So, why's your brother giving you crap about that? Jealous you're hanging out with Karl and not him?" Dream asked.

"No, nothing like that. It's just... stupid teenage boy stuff." Sapnap muttered. Silence ensued on the other end of the line and Sapnap knew Dream must've been trying to think of a topic to change the conversation to. "Anyway, how have you been? I see you're surviving, despite my absence." Sapnap let out a laugh, which he was surprised felt genuine.

"Me? Oh, pfft. I'm *fine*, forgot you were gone in all honesty. It's Patches who misses you. She misses hanging out with you-"

"Oh, I bet." Sapnap laughed.

"She misses playing video games with you." Sapnap let out more laughter as Dream continued.

"And she really misses, uh, making mayonnaise with you-" Dream and Sapnap both erupted into laughter, Dream's wheeze made the speaker on Sapnap's phone crackle with how loud it was, making Sapnap laugh harder.

"Thanks man, you don't know how much I needed a good laugh." Sapnap said once both of them

had calmed down a bit. He was still catching his breath when he heard a few knocks on his door. "I gotta go though, pretty sure Andy's at my door." Sapnap groaned. Dream wished him good luck before hanging up.

"Andrew, just fuck off for a bit, okay?" Sapnap raised his voice slightly, so it could be heard through the door.

"If it's not Andrew, do I still need to fuck off?" Karl answered, opening the door a crack to peek inside.

"Shit, sorry, I was going to head back down but then Dream called and-"

"Hey, hey, I was fine. No need to apologize so much." Karl laughed, walking in and climbing on the bed with Sapnap. Karl laid flat on the bed, reaching up and pulling on Sapnap's shirt in an attempt to get him to lay with him.

"If he knew how you felt about him, do you think he would still be okay with all that?"

Sapnap could hear Andrew's innocent question ringing in his head, the guilt he felt just before Dream called was already sinking back in.

"Let's find you something to wear." Sapnap said quickly, standing up. Karl's loose grip on his shirt fell as he pulled away. "Because Andrew was right, you really can't wear that to a rodeo." Sapnap said, forcing a smile.

"Nick, are you al-"

"You said you'd stop calling me that." Sapnap interrupted, turning around to face Karl. Karl had sat up in the bed, one leg tucked underneath him and the other dangling off the edge. His hands were held together in his lap, his eyes looking up to Sapnap with concern painted over his face.

"I'm alright, I promise." Sapnap said with a sigh, instinctively walking towards Karl. He paused once he was still a few steps away, unfortunately remembering what Andrew said again.

"No you're not, you're doing it again." Karl's voice sounded heart broken. If only he understood that Sapnap *wanted* to lay with him, he *wanted* to hold him, he *wanted* to do so much more. "Did I do something wrong?" Karl asked, looking away like he was a kid ready to be scolded.

"No, *no*. You've done absolutely nothing wrong. When I was on the phone with Dream, I was literally just telling him how fucking thankful I am that you're here- I *swear*." Sapnap said, pushing his guilt aside and grabbing Karl's hand in his own.

Karl looked at their hands, Sapnap's holding onto his firmly while his fingers laid limp. Sapnap looked down as well, reaching out his other hand to push Karl's fingers against the back of his palm.

"Being here is just... it's a really confusing place for me to be. I'm sorry if I've been pushing those feelings onto you. I love you, you know that, right?" Sapnap spoke quietly, taking one of his hands away from Karl's, placing it on Karl's cheek instead.

"I know." Karl spoke up softly after taking a few seconds to scan over Sapnap's face.

"So *trust* me. Trust that when I can't sit with my feelings alone, I'll come to you. I don't want to burden you with every thought that goes on in my head." Sapnap assured Karl, rubbing his thumb against Karl's cheek. Karl's large blue eyes were staring up at him, practically staring *through* him.

"You have *never* been a burden-

"And I want to keep it that way. Just... trust me." Sapnap finished, gliding his hand into Karl's hair, running his fingers against his scalp, before pulling away. "Now, seriously, let's see if we can find you something to wear." Sapnap said with a smile, tugging on Karl's hand to help him stand.

Chapter End Notes

okay, I promise yeehaw arc will begin momentarily

Take a breath, now. Take another

Chapter Summary

Jen hints to Sapnap that she knows more than she's letting on

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Karl and Sapnap left his room after realizing not only did Sapnap not have anything for Karl to borrow, but he also didn't have anything very appropriate to wear himself. Sapnap and Karl were both still laughing about how Karl's brother Sean made him take off the flannel he was planning on wearing, saying he looked like he was starring in a bad western movie.

"Honestly, tell Sean that he *sucks*!" Sapnap laughed, separating himself from Karl's side to knock on Andrew's door.

Andrew opened his door, confusion on his face when he saw Sapnap and Karl standing before him. Especially considering their last conversation, he looked surprised to see Sapnap with a smile on his face at all.

"Let Karl borrow some clothes for tonight. You were right." Sapnap said with an eye roll, putting his arm around Karl's waist to push him into the room. Andrew stepped to the side quickly, letting Karl walk in.

"Wait, where are you going?" Andrew asked as soon as he turned around to see Sapnap walking away.

"You guys are built like string beans, nothing in your closet is going to fit *me*." Sapnap laughed, gesturing to his much stockier build. "I'm going to go rummage through dad's clothes." Sapnap pointed to their parents' bedroom, which was directly across the hall.

"Seriously?" Karl whined, looking around Andrew's room, obviously uncomfortable.

"I'll be back in a second." Sapnap said with a laugh and a wave, walking into his parents' room. As soon as he shut the door behind him, he leaned against the door, his smile instantly fading. He was at war with himself. Sapnap wished he could just hate Andrew for polluting his mind with such a thought. The only thing stopping him from doing that was the fact Andrew was *right*.

"Pull yourself together." Sapnap mumbled to himself, pulling his back away from the door and opening his eyes. He nearly stumbled back into the door when his gaze instantly landed on Jen, lounging on the sunbed with a book in her hand.

"Shit- sorry, I was just going to grab, uh-"

"Clothes for tonight. I heard you in the hall." Jen said with a soft smile, looking at Sapnap with a bit of concern in her eyes.

"Yeah, uh. Sorry." Sapnap said again, walking quickly towards the closet.

"I know I'm not your mom." Jen spoke up, making Sapnap freeze in his tracks. "I'm not your mom, but I am *a* mom, so I... *notice* things. And just because I'm not *your* mom doesn't mean I don't love you unconditionally." Jen continued, closing her book as Sapnap looked over his shoulder slowly.

"What do you mean by that?" Sapnap asked with a painfully fake laugh.

"I just want to remind you that I love you. *Nothing* could ever change that." Jen smiled, standing up from the sunbed. "Your dad isn't always the easiest person to talk to, okay, maybe he's one of the most difficult people to talk to." Jen said with a slight laugh after Sapnap scoffed, as she headed to the bedroom door. "But, I've been *told* that I'm a good person to confide in, if you ever need someone to talk to. That's all." She finished with another smile, stepping out into the hall.

Even after he was alone in the room, Sapnap still stood frozen in front of the closet, his heart pounding out of his chest.

She knows. She *knows*.

How could she know? What *things* did she notice? What does she want him to confide in her?

Sapnap reached out to the closet's frame for support, feeling like he was going to throw up. He closed his eyes, doing his best to slow down his breathing. He doesn't have time for this. He wasn't even planning on leaving Karl alone with Andrew for this long.

Sapnap pushed through the anxiety rising in his chest, grabbing the first t-shirt and flannel he saw in his dad's closet. He paused just before opening the bedroom door, releasing his white-knuckled grip on the handle.

After another series of deep breaths, Sapnap finally felt like he could face Karl without giving him more reason to worry. He swung open the bedroom door, the sounds of laughter flooding the hall. Sapnap walked slowly to Andrew's door, pushing it open with several creaks.

Karl was standing in the middle of the room, Andrew was sitting on his bed, and Jen was leaning against the dresser- smiles on all of their faces.

Karl had kept his ripped black jeans on but changed into a white t-shirt and the purple flannel Jen was wearing a minute ago, posing in the center of the room for Andrew and Jen.

"Do I look like a real cowboy?" Karl asked Sapnap as soon as his eyes landed on him, using an atrocious southern accent.

"You look like a *moron*." Sapnap answered, completely unable to hide his smile growing from ear to ear. Karl was giggling, walking over to Sapnap and picking up the clothes he had chosen, which were draped over his arm.

"Boo, you're no fun. Black on black?" Karl asked, scanning the t-shirt and flannel. Sapnap had ended up grabbing a plain black t-shirt and a flannel that was primarily black with a few thin red and white lines.

"I like the basics." Sapnap shrugged, taking back the clothes. Karl rolled his eyes playfully, heading back into Andrew's closet to grab the clothes he had changed out of.

"Your turn, Nick. I told you we wanted *lots* of pictures." Jen said with a smile, pulling out her phone.

"We're not even leaving for a few hours, why would I-"

"Just get dressed." Jen interrupted with a laugh, nodding her head towards the closet. Karl had just walked out, his sweater and white button-up draped over his arm. Sapnap rolled his eyes, heading out of the bedroom.

"Let me at least go get some jeans on." Sapnap said over his shoulder, already heading for his own room. He wasn't surprised to hear Karl calling after him when he was at the end of the hall, sliding across the hardwood floor in his socks to catch up.

"Do you want me to bring your stuff up for you?" Sapnap asked, reaching out to take Karl's clothes. Karl laughed, handing them over, before stepping ahead of Sapnap and up the small staircase.

"I was coming to watch you change, but you can carry my stuff if you want." Karl had a beaming smile as he looked over his shoulder, continuing to race up the stairs once Sapnap began chasing after him.

Karl entered the room first, jumping directly into Sapnap's bed. Once Sapnap entered and reached out for Karl, and Karl held his hands up in defense.

"Bed is safe! I'm in the safe zone!" Karl pleaded, swatting away Sapnap's hands.

"Wha-" Sapnap couldn't even finish his thought, as he began laughing. He hadn't heard of such childish rules in years. Karl wasn't even laughing, he was just smiling up at Sapnap, watching as he laughed heartily.

"Whatever, enjoy the show from the *safe zone*." Sapnap laughed, tossing the clothes he was carrying to the side, already pulling off his shirt. He was doing his best to not look at Karl, a blush spreading across his cheeks.

The way Karl was *smiling* at him. That was Sapnap's favorite smile of Karl's. He never really knew what made him smile so brightly, but whenever Karl smiled like that, it never failed to make Sapnap's heart skip a beat. That smile alone reminded him of all the reasons he fell for Karl in the first place.

Karl's smile, the sound of his high-pitched laugh, how he was the first person to make Sapnap realize how important physical touch was to him, his ability to make Sapnap happy on even his darkest days, and so much more. There was no one in the world who knew him better than Karl did. Hell, Karl probably knew Sapnap better than he knew himself.

Karl continued to giggle to himself, whistling a few catcalls while Sapnap changed, making Sapnap's smile grow even more.

He was undoubtedly in love with him.

Chapter End Notes

I've been talking about this yeehaw arc for so long and literally the only yeehaw thing to happen so far is they put on some flannel shirts lmao. I promise the yeehaw will get more.. yeehaw-ey (?) soon. Also, soooo excited for the chapter that comes out on monday :))

Have a body again, under gravity, in air

Chapter Summary

Karl confesses something to Sapanp

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Don't forget your hat." Karl called out once Sapanp began heading for the bedroom door, now fully dressed in his outfit for the rodeo. Karl was holding out Sapanp's signature black baseball cap, walking towards him.

"That's not my hat tonight." Sapanp smiled, taking the hat from Karl's hand and tossing it on the bed. Karl tilted his head to the side, looking between Sapanp and the discarded hat.

Sapanp walked past Karl in silence, heading for his closet. After a minute or two of rummaging through his old belongings, he finally found what he was looking for. Sapanp soon stepped out of his closet with a black cowboy hat on.

Karl instantly started laughing when Sapanp appeared.

"Sap, no! *No*, take that off!" Karl cried out between his laughs. Sapanp's smile continued to grow as he eliminated the space between them, reaching out to take Karl's hand. Karl was practically jumping with how much he was giggling, extending his hand for Sapanp.

"I'm not Sap tonight, I'm Nicolas, the lonesome cowboy." Sapanp said with his thickest southern accent, leaning down and kissing the back of Karl's hand. Karl squealed and jumped in place, pulling his hand away as quickly as he had given it to Sapanp.

"More like the *handsome* cowboy." Karl said once he had finally stopped laughing, walking up to Sapanp and adjusting the stray hairs that had fallen into his face. "Oh stop that, let me fix it." Karl said with a smile, bringing his hand to the side of Sapanp's face to prevent him from turning away.

Sapanp was trying desperately to avert his gaze from Karl. It took a lot of practice, but Sapanp no longer blushed from physical affection with Karl. However, no matter how often Karl complimented him, he still found himself blushing every time.

"*You* stop, I'm going for the rugged cowboy look tonight." Sapanp finally said, successfully walking away from Karl. He wasn't surprised when he heard Karl chuckling behind him.

"Not sure how many cowgirls are going to be into that." Karl said with another laugh, catching up to Sapanp. He couldn't help but hesitate, his hand freezing halfway extended for his doorknob.

Cowgirls.

Sapanp quickly reached for the doorknob, opening the door for Karl. He was thankful that Karl must've not noticed his stalling pace, as he walked by completely unbothered. Sapanp wasn't sure why, but part of him felt sick to his stomach thinking about how Karl was still under the impression he was straight.

Not only had he come out to Andrew, but apparently Jen had been suspecting *something* was going on, which he could only assume was a reference to his sexuality. So the fact that Karl, the person who he felt the closest to in the whole world, was still so oblivious to such a vital part of his identity, it almost felt like some big cosmic joke.

Sapnap tried to shrug off the feeling, remembering that it was better this way. If Karl was in the dark about his sexuality, there were no threats to their friendship- and Sapnap valued their friendship more than anything.

Karl walked ahead, Sapnap trailing a bit behind. He wished he could get a better grasp on his emotions, all too aware of how Karl seemed to pick up on every shift in his mood. The last thing he wanted was to bring down the lighthearted mood he worked so hard to bring back.

"So, where does one attend a rodeo anyway?" Karl asked, his smile from their previous conversation had transformed into something much smaller.

"The NRG Arena out in Houston. Same one we went to when I was a kid." Sapnap sighed, keeping a short distance between him and Karl. Based on Karl's tone, Sapnap figured that he must've already picked up that he was basically sulking.

"Wha-" Sapnap nearly ran into Karl's back when he stopped walking abruptly, standing directly in front of him.

"This isn't going to be as scary as I think it's gonna be, right?" Karl asked.

"Scary? What, no! Karl, what do you think happens at a rodeo?" Sapnap laughed for the first time since he started overthinking about Karl's perception of his sexuality. It seemed almost fitting that Karl's biggest stressor about going to a rodeo was wondering if it would be *scary*.

"Don't people, like, ride bulls and get thrown in the air? Aren't rodeos where they wave the red flag and make all the bulls pissed off? Don't people get hurt?" Karl asked in rapid succession, making Sapnap continue to laugh as he stepped around him.

"Yeah, but that stuff's not *scary*!" Sapnap didn't make it more than a foot away from Karl before he reached out and held onto Sapnap's arm, stopping him in his tracks.

"You *know* how I am around blood." Karl said, his face dead serious. Sapnap looked over his shoulder in the direction of his family's voices traveling up the stairwell.

"Look, there's a bunch of stuff to do at a rodeo. It's not *just* cowboys getting knocked around by bulls. If I can tell it's going to be a rough match, I'll take you to go do something else. Promise." Sapnap said with a small smile, reaching over to adjust the collar of Karl's flannel.

"Thanks, Sap." Karl answered with a relieved smile, sliding his hand down Sapnap's arm until they were hand in hand.

"I'm not kissing your hand again." Sapnap laughed, pulling his hand away from Karl.

"You *clearly* didn't appreciate it enough the first time." He continued over his shoulder, beginning to descend the staircase.

"April 23rd, September 18th, January 26th, March 4th, and today, April 15th." Karl started listing off from his place at the top of the stairwell.

Sapnap turned around, complete confusion written all over his face. He had absolutely no idea what the significance of those dates were to Karl. Sapnap blinked rapidly, convinced his eyes must

have been deceiving him. There was *no* way Karl's cheeks could actually be that pink.

"Those are, uh, the dates of all the times you've kissed my hands. There was also the 13th, the night you first got here. You kissed the top of my head on the swing. The point is, I remember the dates *because* of how much I appreciate it." Karl explained, looking around the hall. Sapnap began walking up the stairs slowly, Karl's face appearing to redden further with each step Sapnap took.

"You remember all those dates... because they were days when I kissed you?" Sapnap asked slowly, finally stepping back up to the same level as Karl. "Hey, if I can't hide, neither can you." Sapnap continued, gently holding Karl's chin to turn his head so they were face to face.

"I mean, is that a bad thing?" Karl asked. Even though Sapnap was holding Karl's face in his hand, Karl was still refusing to make eye contact.

"No, it's not a bad thing. It's... It's a really nice thing." Sapnap answered, pausing once Karl finally looked him in the eyes.

"I know it's cheesy, and probably even *weird*- but you were just so 'anti-affection' when we first met that I found myself remembering the days when I thought we made progress. So when you kissed my hand that first time- the date just stuck with me and-"

"You don't need to justify it. I just wish I knew sooner that this sort of thing made you so happy." Sapnap cut Karl off mid ramble. "I would've done it more often if I had known." Sapnap's voice was soft, his grip on Karl's chin tightening when Karl tried looking away again.

"I'm just dumb and sentimental, you don't need to do anything more often just to make me happy or-"

Karl's words failed to appear when Sapnap turned Karl's face, pressing his lips against his cheek. Sapnap pulled away slowly, dropping his hand from Karl's chin and taking a small step back.

A smile grew on Sapnap's face when Karl brought a hand up to hold the cheek he kissed, as he caught a glimpse of just how red Karl's face was in comparison to his hand.

"It doesn't just make *you* happy." Sapnap assured Karl. For the first time, Sapnap could feel his own cheeks heating up but didn't feel the need to hide it.

Chapter End Notes

I mean... gotta give the homies a kiss every now and then

Respawn in the long dream

Chapter Summary

Sapnap, Karl, Andrew, and Ben arrive at the rodeo

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"One more, just *one* more!" Jen begged, holding her arms out to prevent Ben and Andrew from walking away.

"Jen-" The two groaned in unison. Sapnap grabbed them both by the collars of their shirts, pulling them back into frame.

"The sooner you *comply* the sooner we *leave*." Sapnap said in a rough whisper, making sure to keep a painfully fake smile on his face. Jen, despite saying 'one' more, had continued to take photos this whole time.

Andrew and Ben shuffled back into place. Sapnap returned his arm to its place of being wrapped around Karl's waist, knowing that the way Ben was standing would cover it up in the photos Jen had been taking.

Sapnap's mind was still racing, thinking about how he kissed Karl's cheek. He *actually* kissed Karl's cheek- and Karl *liked* it. Sapnap felt like he was still waiting to wake up.

"Come on, Nick. You look like you're constipated or something. Give me a real smile so you can get on the road." Jen called out, making Marisol laugh from the side lines. Sapnap rolled his eyes, giving a very fake grin.

"You could think about kissing my cheek again, that seemed to get a decent smile out of you." Karl leaned over, whispering in Sapnap's ear. Sapnap tightened his grip around Karl's waist, turning to face him just in time to see Karl's bright smile and flushed cheeks.

"Alright, face forward and *smile*." Jen said with her own cheesy grin, looking over her phone at the four boys in front of her. Sapnap didn't seem to have a hard time producing a genuine smile this time.

"Drive safe, have fun, and Nick- don't push either of your brothers into the ring." Jen said with a smile and wave, watching as the four filed out the front door.

"No promises!" Sapnap called out with a smile, ushering Karl through the front door with a gentle hand on his back.

"I'll keep an eye on him, don't worry!" Karl said over his shoulder, despite Sapnap trying his best to get him out the front door. Sapnap continued to push Karl forward as Jen and his dad laughed in the background.

"Can I drive?" Andrew pitched, already standing beside the driver's door of Sapnap's car. Sapnap let out an abrupt laugh, pushing Andrew's shoulder so he was standing by the door to the back seat.

"Yeah, over my dead body." Sapnap laughed, climbing in and choosing to ignore Andrew's muttering.

"Can I at least have the aux?" Andrew asked from the back seat. Sapnap continued to laugh, wrapping his arm around the passenger seat, both to back up and look at his brothers.

"It's bluetooth, dumbass. I don't care, as long as your music taste isn't shit." Sapnap answered, turning around to head down the driveway. Andrew seemed unbothered by the insults, gladly pulling out his phone and connecting it to Sapnap's car.

Sapnap soared down the road, smiling from hearing both his brothers cheering in the back seat. Karl seemed much less enthused about speeding down backroads, but he had a smile on his face nonetheless.

The drive wasn't too long, only about 45 minutes before they were already seeing signs for the arena. Traffic was much heavier now, with them being fairly close to Houston and all the other people heading to the rodeo.

"Hand me my wallet." Sapnap turned down the radio, pointing to his glove compartment. Karl handed it to him as Sapnap put the car in park. There were still a few cars ahead of them in line at the ticket booth.

"After we park, I don't wanna see your snot-nosed faces for *at least* an hour." Sapnap said, turning around with a smile, holding out two 100 dollar bills. Andrew and Ben's faces instantly lit up as they reached out and accepted the money.

"Aye-" Sapnap said once he turned back around in his seat, pulling the car up to the ticket booth. "First round starts at 6:30. Find me and Karl *before* then, got it? I don't want to fight the crowds trying to find you two." Sapnap continued, pointing between them in the rear view mirror.

"Go play *every* game they have available and then find you guys before the first round, got it!" Ben said excitedly, practically bouncing in his seat.

"And *when* is the first round?" Sapnap asked.

"6:30!" Ben and Andrew said in unison, just as Sapnap rolled down his window, handing their tickets to the girl working the booth.

"How y'all doing tonight?" She asked with a peppy tone, leaning over the edge to reach out for the tickets.

"We're good, thank you." Sapnap said with a smile, trying to stop himself from laughing. He wasn't sure if she actually had that thick of an accent or if she was just putting on a show since it was a rodeo.

"Never seen one of these fancy cars this far out of the city." She said with a smile, counting out the four wristbands much slower than necessary. Sapnap looked in the rear view mirror, seeing that his brothers were fully immersed in their own conversation.

"We're just in town for a bit, visiting my family." Sapnap said with a much more forced smile, leaning a bit out the window. "We're-" Sapnap cut himself off when he felt one of Karl's hands slide across his thigh.

"It's my first rodeo." Karl said with an equally forced smile, leaning across the center console so he could also see the girl working the ticket booth. From the height of the booth, she had a complete

view of the inside of the car, her eyes landing instantly on the hand Karl still had resting on Sapnap's thigh.

"Well, I hope we live up to your expectations." She said with a much less interested smile. Sapnap was surprised that her sudden drop in charisma didn't seem to come from a place of disgust, but more so just that she seemed to no longer be interested in flirting with him.

"I hope so too." Karl said with a smile, leaning back in his seat once she finally handed the four wristbands to Sapnap. He pulled the car away as quickly as the slow moving traffic would allow, his attention divided between Karl and the look Andrew was giving him from the backseat.

"Okay, fuck off now." Sapnap said holding two wristbands over his shoulder the second the car was in park. Ben didn't seem to mind, instantly grabbing the wristbands and jumping out of the car. Andrew lingered a second, keeping a close eye on Ben, who was heading towards the entrance.

"I have my phone on me, text me if you need us for anything." Andrew said, leaning forward as he opened the door, sticking his face in the crack next to Sapnap's headrest. "Or if there's anything you want to *explain*." He whispered, climbing out of the car before Sapnap even had time to react.

Andrew shut the car door, leaving Sapnap and Karl alone. The silence in the car was occasionally interrupted by yelling kids and loud conversations of others getting out of their parked cars.

"So... what was *that*?" Sapnap finally asked, turning to face Karl for the first time. Karl had the vanity mirror pulled down, attempting to adjust his hair.

"What was what?" Karl asked, seemingly unbothered.

"*This is my first rodeo, teehee!*" Sapnap mocked, pushing himself into Karl's lap and sliding his hand up Karl's thigh. Karl instantly burst out laughing, like he didn't have the strength to hold it back any longer.

"Oh come on, she was giving you '*fuck me*' eyes! '*What an expensive car, how about you take me for a drive in it?*'" Karl said, mocking her southern accent once he finally calmed down from his laughter.

"She didn't even say that! And why does it matter how she was looking at me?" Sapnap was still laughing himself, fully leaned back in his own seat by now.

"Because you *clearly* weren't into her. She's not your type." Karl shrugged with a smile, bringing his attention back to the small mirror.

"Oh yeah, and what's my type?" Sapnap asked sarcastically, pulling down his vanity mirror and checking on the state of his own appearance.

"Well, according to your dad, girls who look like *me*." Karl said with a smile, turning to face Sapnap. Karl had already brought up a hand to cover his face, while he began laughing just from seeing Sapnap's reaction.

"You little shit, *you're* the one I'm going to be throwing in with the bulls!" Sapnap laughed, pushing himself against Karl to fluff up the hair Karl had worked so hard to tame. Sapnap couldn't even be bothered by the stares they were getting from everyone walking past the car, too wrapped up in how much he loved listening to Karl laugh.

..... Karl? Are you... jealous?

There you are

Chapter Summary

Karl overcomes one of his fears at the rodeo

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"So, a rodeo is just a carnival but the only clown here is you?" Karl asked, ripping off a piece of Sapnap's cotton candy. Sapnap nudged his shoulder into Karl, making Karl sway a bit.

"Moron." Sapnap said with an eye roll, despite the smile on his face. "But, yes, a rodeo is essentially just a carnival." He finished.

Sapnap knew that any other time, he would go to great lengths to explain all the reasons a rodeo is *not* just a carnival and what makes it different and significantly better. However, at that moment in time, all he could think about was the way Karl's hand brushed against his own with each step they took.

If they were in North Carolina, Florida, or even the UK, he wouldn't hesitate to reach over and intertwine their fingers. Sapnap really hated that he was still so fearful of what could happen to either of them if they were to show any form of PDA.

Karl reached over and not so sneakily took another piece of Sapnap's cotton candy, resulting in Sapnap finding a smile creeping up on him again. Getting the chance to even just walk next to Karl was enough to pull him out of any bad mood.

"Follow me, I wanna show you something." Sapnap said, bumping his shoulder into Karl's to get his attention. Karl looked around eagerly, turning to walk in the new direction.

This area was a bit more crowded, which Sapnap expected. He was quite thankful for it too, seeing that it meant Karl was constantly leaning into him to avoid bumping into strangers.

"We're here." Sapnap said, stopping in his tracks. Karl looked around aimlessly for a bit, eventually looking back to Sapnap with a raised eyebrow. They were surrounded by families, small kids running by them, but nothing that seemed to be of significance.

"Where is *here*?" Karl asked with a nervous laugh, fully pressing himself into Sapnap's side when a group of kids pushed past them.

"You're going to pet a bull." Sapnap said with a smile, wrapping his arm around Karl's waist- not because he had been thinking about doing that for the last hour, no, it was simply to help Karl keep his balance in the crowd.

"I'm going to *what*?" Karl asked, his attention instantly being pulled to the sound of excited screams and huffing from a bull just behind them. There was a break in the crowd, two men walking up holding onto ropes tied around a bull's mouth.

Karl practically jumped into Sapnap's arms, attempting to get away. As Karl tried to push back, the

crowds around them were pushing forward, making it impossible to get away. Karl had wrapped both his arms around Sapnap's shoulders, his face buried in the crook of Sapnap's neck. Meanwhile, Sapnap had both arms around Karl's waist, trying to get him to turn around and face the bull.

"Nothing to be afraid of, it's not a fighting bull." Sapnap said with a laugh, pushing Karl forward gently. "One pet and we can go." Sapnap offered, leaning his head back to see Karl's face.

"It's not going to go rogue and throw someone- throw *me* into the air, promise?" Karl asked with clear panic on his face. Sapnap couldn't help but laugh, no matter how serious he knew Karl was being.

"I promise, there is a *zero* percent chance of that happening." Sapnap said with a smile. He almost felt disappointed when Karl unwrapped himself from around his shoulders, moving hesitantly towards the bull.

"He won't bite." One of the men holding the ropes said as Karl approached. They seemed to be equally as amused by Karl's hesitance, seeing that young children were walking directly up to the bull with less fear than him. Sapnap stood back and watched as Karl let out a nervous laugh, reaching out his hand slowly towards the bull's face.

Sapnap made sure to quickly pull out his phone, taking many pictures, as Jen requested. Also, this was a memory Sapnap wanted to be able to look back on any time.

Sapnap could only describe his feeling as pride when Karl finally pet the bull, pulling his hand away instantly before slowly reaching back out to pet it again. Sapnap could even hear Karl let out a few laughs when the bull seemed to be rubbing its head against his hand on its own.

"Thank you." Karl said with an awkward wave to one of the handlers, walking quickly back to Sapnap's side.

"Well?" Sapnap asked, putting his arm around Karl's waist again when a new influx of kids started pushing forward.

"It was actually pretty cute." Karl said with a smile, looking over to Sapnap. Sapnap smiled back, beginning to pull Karl away from the crowd.

"Wait, aren't you going to pet it too?" Karl asked, standing his ground so they wouldn't lose their place at the front of the small crowd.

"Do you have any idea how *dangerous* those things are? I'm not going anywhere near it!" Sapnap said with a laugh, pulling Karl away, which quickly turned into Karl chasing after him, both of them laughing until their lungs ached.

"Truce! Truce!" Sapnap called out, holding both of his hands out to block Karl from running into him. They were both panting, laughs still somehow accompanying every exhale.

"You- you told me it was *s-safe*! You promised!" Karl stuttered, still struggling to catch his breath.

"I'm messing with you, it *is* safe. There's probably pictures at home where my parents have me and my brothers sitting on one of the show bulls." Sapnap finally stood up straight, smiling down to Karl, who was still hunched over.

Karl's laugh slowly fell, being replaced with a smile so delicate and soft, Sapnap was almost taken aback by it.

"What's that face for?" Sapnap tried to play it off with a laugh, finding himself getting a bit nervous with the way Karl was staring at him.

"I'm just having a really good time." Karl said softly. It was a miracle Sapnap could even hear him over the sounds of families talking, kids screaming, people cheering-

People cheering.

"Shit, it's almost 6:30. Are you good to run again?" Sapnap asked, grabbing onto Karl's hand out of instinct and pulling him through the crowds.

"Where are we going now?" Karl asked from behind. Sapnap could barely hear him, but he could feel Karl tightening his grip around his hand every few seconds.

"We need to get to the front line by the barrier- that's where Andy and Ben will be looking for us." Sapnap explained, doing his best to talk over his shoulder and keep an eye out in front of him.

"Sap, I'm gonna die, I can't-"

"Aye!" Sapnap came to an abrupt halt, placing two fingers in his mouth to whistle, before waving his free hand in the air. Andrew and Ben instantly spotted them, shoving their way through the crowd until the four were reunited.

"Give me your keys." Andrew held out his hand, making a grabby motion when Sapnap failed to hand them over. "I'm not holding all this shit for another two hours. I'm going to put mine and Ben's prizes in the car." He explained.

"Oh, yeah, of course." Sapnap agreed, finally noticing the various stuffed animals and bags of candy his brothers had accumulated. "Do you guys need more mon-"

"Why are you and Karl holding hands?" Ben asked, staring at Karl and Sapnap's fingers, still interlocked from their run across the arena. Andrew turned around instantly, undoubtedly giving Ben some form of glare.

Karl and Sapnap pulled their hands apart before Ben and Andrew even looked back at them. Sapnap's eyes landed on Andrew's with nothing short of panic in his stare.

"I was falling behind, so he was making sure I didn't get lost. Honestly forgot I hadn't let go yet." Karl said with a laugh, slapping Sapnap's arm. Ben still seemed a bit lost, especially because of Andrew's sudden hostility.

Andrew reached forward, taking the key out of Sapnap's hand. He turned back, hitting Ben with one of the bags of candy he was holding, nodding in the direction of the exit. Ben muttered something under his breath, rubbing his arm and following Andrew in silence.

"Was that as weird for you as it was for me?" Karl asked once Sapnap's brothers were out of earshot. Sapnap obviously couldn't admit it, but that situation was *much* more uncomfortable for him.

"Nah, Ben's just at that weird age. Ignore him." Sapnap said with a pained smile, moving up towards the barrier. Karl followed closely behind until they reached the gate. An overhead announcement boomed throughout the arena, causing Karl to jump.

The rodeo was about to begin.

Chapter End Notes

okay, don't hate ben- he's like 13. his question was asked innocently, not judgmentally
:)

Your body touching the universe again

Chapter Summary

Karl sparks up a conversation with one of the cowboys, accidentally getting himself into a situation he doesn't quite understand.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It had only been a few minutes since they found Sapnap's brothers, but Karl couldn't stop thinking about the way his hand felt abnormally cold for a warm spring evening, now that Sapnap's fingers weren't intertwined with his.

Even as crowds of people pushed against him, Karl was a bit confused to find himself thankful for the lack of personal space, because it meant he could finally return to Sapnap's side.

It was just that Sapnap had seemed to be much more physically distant today, like there was a metaphorical bubble around him that Karl wasn't allowed in. Well, until Sapnap had finally reached out his hand, pulling Karl along, as they sprinted through the thickening crowds.

"Are you ready?" Sapnap looked over his shoulder, his eyes locking with Karl's instantly. Karl smiled, leaning on the railing in front of them.

"Born re-"

"How y'all doin' tonight?" A loud overhead announcement boomed throughout the arena, causing the crowds to cheer and yell. Karl flinched from the abrupt voice, getting a laugh out of Sapnap.

Karl felt like he could finally relax again when Sapnap wrapped his arm around his waist, pulling him away from the barrier. Before Karl could ask what Sapnap was doing, groups of men riding horses flooded through the gates, stirring up dirt and more excitement from the crowd.

Karl turned to hide his face in Sapnap's shoulder when some of the cowboys looked like they were going to run right into them, never failing to turn at the very last second. They seemed to be putting on quite a show and the crowd was loving it.

"Do you want to move back? We don't have to be this close if it's scary-"

"No!" Karl said just a bit too quickly, pulling his head off Sapnap's shoulder. Sapnap didn't seem bothered by Karl's rushed response, a smile growing on his face regardless. "I'm not scared- well, at least not as scared as I thought I was going to be." Karl continued with a laugh.

"Good, because Ben and Andy would kill me if I gave up our spot before they got back." Sapnap laughed, reaching up to brush some of Karl's hair behind his ear. Karl closed his eyes, waiting for the familiar feeling of Sapnap's short nails running along his scalp.

After a second, Karl opened his eyes to see Sapnap now rubbing the back of his own neck, looking straight ahead after failing to reach Karl. Karl tucked the hair he knew Sapnap was planning to behind his ear, also facing forward.

Was there a reason why Sapnap was being so distant? Now that Karl was thinking about it, he really only seemed to be initiating any contact if it was necessary- keeping an arm around him when the crowds were pushing them around, holding his hand to run, grabbing him by the waist to get him away from the barrier, and so on.

Just as Karl was about to speak up, to ask Sapnap if something was going on, Sapnap started talking again.

"I'm going to go grab a drink, do you want anything?" Sapnap asked, already turning to face the crowd behind them.

"Uh, no, I'm okay." Karl answered, looking over to see where the nearest drink stand was. He was thankful it was close and it didn't seem to have much of a line.

"I'll grab you something." Sapnap said with a smile, reaching out and giving Karl's arm a quick squeeze before disappearing into the crowd. Karl faced the arena again, holding on tightly to the barrier, and looking down at his shoes. Surely Sapnap wouldn't be gone for too long. Surely he'd be back before anything-

"Hi there."

Karl looked up from the ground in surprise, standing face to face with one of the riders. He was about Karl's height and age, maybe just a bit taller. Karl wasn't sure why, but he seemed to be everything he pictured when he thought 'cowboy'. Wavy black hair, tan skin, dimples when he smiled, and a southern accent that could be spotted from a mile away. He was also walking with his horse beside him, a beautiful all white horse with a braided mane.

"Hi." Karl said with a smile, reaching out to pet the horse's face as it got closer to him.

"This here is Delilah." He said with a smile, looking over Karl. "I've got to say, a city boy like you sticks out like a sore thumb. You managed to catch my eye from the other side of the arena." He said with a laugh, reaching out and taking Karl's hand in his own, tapping his thumb on Karl's painted nails.

"Oh, I hope that's not a bad thing." Karl said with a nervous laugh, attempting to pull his hand away.

"Well, city boys *can* be trouble, but I do have a soft spot for the pretty ones. Name's Charlie, pleasure to meet you." He said, his hand following Karl's as he pulled away, taking Karl's hand in his own to shake it. Karl found the gesture to actually be quite funny, letting out a laugh. Maybe it was something about Charlie's southern charm.

"Well, *Charlie*, I'm Karl and the pleasure is all mine- if you'll let me pet Delilah again." Karl smiled and Charlie laughed, taking a step to the side so Delilah could get closer to the barrier.

Karl happily pet her again, running his hands through the small amount of her mane that wasn't braided. He was actually hoping that Sapnap would come back in time to see him petting a horse on his own.

"I can't help but notice you don't have a hat on." Charlie said with a smile, tipping the brim of his hat in Karl's direction. Karl looked around, seeing a fair number of people also not wearing hats.

"Should I be wearing one?" Karl asked. He was a bit shocked to see the smile growing on Charlie's face, a laugh soon following.

"I guess that's up to you." Charlie finally answered, his eyes glued to Karl's.

"In that case, can I have yours?" Karl asked, looking up to the light brown cowboy hat on Charlie's head. Karl was never this confident, but he thought it would be pretty funny to see Sapnap's reaction to the news he pet a horse *and* got the cowboy's hat in the process.

"Tsk, what did I say? You city boys are nothing but trouble." Charlie's eyes flicked over Karl, his bottom lip ever-so-slightly being pulled between his teeth as he smiled. "You know what you're asking for, right?" Charlie questioned, taking his hat off and ruffling his dark waves.

"I do." Karl lied. He assumed he was just asking for his hat, but he didn't want to further the 'city boy' stereotype by not understanding whatever the hidden meaning was. Karl was still unsure if coming off as a 'city boy' was a good or bad thing.

Karl was startled when he felt a hat being placed on his head, considering he was still looking at Charlie, his hat held in his hand. Karl looked up to see the brim of a black cowboy hat. He turned around to see Sapnap standing behind him, just as Sapnap's arm linked around his waist.

"Looks like he already has a hat." Sapnap interjected. Karl looked between Sapnap and Charlie, while Charlie looked between him and Sapnap.

"Nick Armstrong." Charlie said in a voice that sounded as though he was *trying* to get under Sapnap's skin. His tone was cocky and almost sounded like he was surprised by something, one eyebrow raising when he noticed the arm Sapnap had around Karl's waist.

"Charlie Johnson." Sapnap said in the exact same tone, his grip tightening around Karl's waist, like he knew Charlie was looking there.

"You should know better than to let a pretty city boy run around without a hat on, just sayin'." Charlie said, giving Sapnap a look before turning back to Karl. "Lovely meeting you, Karl." He said with a sickeningly sweet smile, while putting his hat back on. Charlie jumped onto his horse and headed back towards the rest of the cowboys.

Karl had no idea what he had gotten himself in the middle of, but he was beginning to wonder what the significance of wearing Charlie's hat actually was and why Sapnap was reacting this way.

Chapter End Notes

AHHHH THIS IS AND THE NEXT COUPLE CHAPTERS ARE WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK IN THE FIRST PLACE

I really just wanted to write about yeehaw possessive cowboy sapnap and oblivious Karl

Also the significance of the hat will be explained soon- not quite sure if you want that in your search history lmao

As though you were separate things

Chapter Summary

Sapnap tries to explain to Andrew why Karl is wearing his hat.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Sapnap finally unhooked his arm from around Karl's waist when Charlie left, taking a step to the side as best he could, considering the thickening crowds.

"Why do I need a hat?" Karl asked. Sapnap wasn't sure, but he felt like he could see Charlie staring at them from the other side of the arena. His suspicions were unfortunately correct when he saw Charlie tip his hat in his direction.

"Don't worry about it, just keep mine on. If anyone tries to give you theirs again or asks about the one you're wearing, just say you're ta- uh, say it's yours." Sapnap corrected himself at the last second.

Sapnap turned around when Karl didn't say anything, seeing that Karl had taken off his hat. Karl was staring at him, looking like he had a million questions on the tip of his tongue. Sapnap reached out, adjusting a few of Karl's hairs before putting his hat back atop Karl's head.

"Just, trust me. Okay?" Sapnap asked, his hand lingering a bit on Karl's cheek before he pulled away. He turned back to the arena, thankful to see Charlie was finally occupied with something else. Sapnap lifted his other hand, showing two bottles of beer he had nearly forgotten about.

"The options were beer, beer, and more beer. So I got you a beer." Sapnap said with an anxious laugh, taking off the lid on the glass bottle before handing it to Karl. Karl reached out slowly, accepting the glass. Honestly, Sapnap was just thankful for a distraction to shift the conversation.

Sapnap knew that the only person who disliked beer more than himself was Karl, so he was quite surprised to see Karl actually taking a sip. Sapnap also took a large sip, instantly grimacing.

"Nothing nastier than warm beer on a muggy night." Sapnap said with another forced laugh, turning to face the barrier. Karl faced forward as well, his shoulder pressing against Sapnap's. Sapnap leaned to the side just enough to get a glimpse of Karl's profile.

He couldn't explain why, but a piece of his heart felt a bit fuller seeing Karl with his hat on. Sapnap had never given a hat to someone at a rodeo, so having the first time he did that be with someone as special to him as Karl, made the whole situation feel somewhat bittersweet.

Sweet because this felt like a milestone of sorts and bitter because Karl was completely oblivious to what it meant.

"*Oh.*" Andrew said from behind, Ben by his side.

Sapnap turned around first, instantly noticing that Andrew was clearly staring at his hat on Karl's head. Thankfully, Ben was still young enough to not understand what it meant, so he was just

looking between Sapnap and Andrew in confusion.

"Yeah, they, uh, pretty much only had beer. Looks like you can be the one to drive us home after all." Sapnap said with a bit of urgency, catching Andrew's attention before Karl could turn to see he was staring at the hat.

"I can drive?" Andrew asked, his interests peaked. Sapnap rolled his eyes, finishing the rest of his beer.

"Looks like it. I'm going to go grab another." Sapnap started, attempting to look through the crowd in the direction of the bar. The last thing he wanted to do was let Andrew drive them home, but he knew he was going to need some form of bargaining chip to keep Andrew's mouth shut.

"I'll go get them this time." Karl said with a smile, handing Sapnap his also empty bottle. Sapnap looked over to Karl with a bit of shock, surprised to see he finished his drink at all, let alone so quickly.

"Wait, at least let me pay-"

"No worries, I got it." Karl said with a smile, already slipping away into the crowd and towards the bar. Sapnap tried to reach out, missing Karl's sleeve by an inch. Sapnap had to fight back a smile as he watched Karl use one hand to hold his hat securely to his head while he weaved through the crowd.

"So, did you guys have fun?" Sapnap asked, turning to face his brothers. Ben's eyes instantly lit up, as if he had already forgotten about the weird looks Sapnap and Andrew were exchanging.

"It was *awesome*!" Ben exclaimed, describing every game he and Andrew had played in rapid succession. Sapnap did his best to smile and nod along to Ben's story, finding himself looking for Karl in the crowd every few seconds.

"-and then Andrew won the *biggest* stuffed animal they had!" Ben finished, practically panting by the end of his rant. The crowd cheered and seemed to all push forward in one quick movement, drawing all their attention back to the rodeo.

Ben jumped up to sit on the barrier and Sapnap instantly grabbed the back of his shirt, making sure there was no way he would *actually* fall in. There was no way in hell he was going to be held accountable for Ben's stupidity.

"Does Karl know what that means?" Andrew leaned over and asked Sapnap as quietly as the screaming crowd allowed.

"*No*, and he doesn't need to. It's not like that." Sapnap muttered, looking around. He was beginning to get concerned about where Karl was. Considering the first round had begun, there couldn't have been much of a line at the bar.

"How is it not-"

"One of the competitors tried to give him his hat- like *actually* give him his hat. It was fucking *Charlie*." Sapnap explained, leaning further into Andrew's side. He was thankful to hear Ben cheering, because that meant that he couldn't hear their conversation.

"Charlie? Wait, like Johnson? He's... gay?" Andrew asked, lowering his voice to a true whisper before saying gay. Sapnap shrugged, looking back to the arena, seeing Charlie leaned against the barrier on the opposite side, talking to another random guy in the crowd.

"All I know is that I came back from getting us drinks and Charlie was about to hand Karl his hat- and he had this *stupid* fucking look on his face too. I didn't have much time so I just threw my hat on Karl's head before Charlie could. Figured it was a better option than punching him in the m-" Sapnap explained, being cut off by Andrew.

"Okay, got it. You're possessive- we know this... But why is Karl *still* wearing it? Charlie hasn't even been over here since we got back." Andrew asked, looking over the crowd to see if he could spot Karl.

"I-... I panicked. I just told him to keep it on and if anyone asks, to say it's his." Sapnap admitted, looking a bit flustered.

"Yeah, like anyone is gonna believe *that*." Andrew scoffed. "He's wearing Jen's flannel and has pink and white nail polish on." He finished, almost with a laugh.

"Whatever..." Sapnap mumbled.

"Listen, I get that you think he's not into guys-"

"I *know* he's not."

"*Regardless*, the point is that no one else here is going to think that by looking at him. There's no shot that anyone's gonna believe he came here already wearing that hat. Not to mention, if anyone finds out it's *yours*, you're going to get roasted alive for breaking a rule like that." Andrew warned, elbowing Sapnap gently when he noticed Karl approaching.

"I'm not breaking any rules." Sapnap shrugged, turning around to see Karl walking towards them. "I mean, technically he *is* coming home with me tonight." Sapnap couldn't fight the small smile growing on his face as Karl approached, his hat tilted back on Karl's head, with one beer in each hand.

Andrew let out a quick laugh, grabbing a fistful of Ben's shirt in place of Sapnap and nudging his older brother in Karl's direction.

"Well, go on and get 'em, cowboy." Andrew laughed. Sapnap turned around to face him, his eyebrow raised. "I can watch Ben, you guys can go wherever you want. You can go *do* whatever you want." Andrew nodded with a wink, throwing a smile in Karl's direction when he finally rejoined the group.

Sapnap continued to stare at Andrew, giving him a look of disbelief, before turning to face Karl again. There was no way Andrew really thought he was going to get away with saying that.

Chapter End Notes

Andrew is out here pushing every boundary he can... and we love him for it

As though we were separate things

Chapter Summary

Karl finds out what being given a cowboy's hat means

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Karl had just finished primarily his entire beer in one go, already feeling like he was going to throw up from the lingering taste of the warm alcohol. He needed to get away for just one second, and getting more drinks seemed like the perfect excuse.

After successfully dodging Sapnap trying to grab his arm, Karl found his way over to the bar. Seeing that the first round had just begun, the bar was completely empty. The bar tender was an older woman with big blonde hair and red lipstick on. Her eyes seemed to perk up the second she saw Karl.

"Hi, can I get two beers? The ones in, uh, the green glass bottle?" Karl questioned, feeling like an idiot for not even checking the name of the beer before heading to the bar.

"Two Heinekens? You got it, sweetheart." She smiled, thankfully pulling two bottles out of a cooler this time, meaning Karl would hopefully be able to prevent himself from feeling any more nauseous than he already was. If Karl was going to be choking down beer, he'd at least prefer it be cold beer.

Karl watched as she stopped just before handing him the beers, noticing that she had caught a glimpse of Sapnap's hat.

"Say, whose hat do you have on?" She asked, setting the beers onto the bar instead of placing them in Karl's outstretched hands.

"Oh, this? Uh, it's mine." Karl answered, not phased at all when she instantly let out a chuckle.

"Texas isn't what you think, at least it's not nearly as bad as it used to be. You can tell an old bird like me which one of these cowboys is taking you home tonight." She smiled, shaking her head no to the cash Karl had pulled out. It seemed being let in on a bit of gossip was worth the cost of the beers in the bartender's eyes.

"Taking me *where*?" Karl asked, completely taken off guard. He pulled the cash back before he spotted a tip jar, quickly shoving the money into it. She raised her eyebrow, her smile fading a bit.

"Oh, honey. You know what wearing a cowboy's hat means, right? They're not supposed to give it to you if you don't." She said concerned, clearly looking around the nearby crowd, trying to spot any cowboys without a hat.

"I-I don't know what it means, but, um, that bull rider- Charlie, he tried giving me his hat, so my friend stepped in and put his on me instead. After Charlie left, I tried to give it back but he told me to keep it on. Is that bad?" Karl explained as quietly as he could over the bar, as the crowd cheered behind him.

Even though Sapnap asked Karl to trust him, he just had too many unanswered questions to turn down any insight she could provide him with. Her eyes perked back up as she leaned over the bar in his direction.

"Oh, baby. Your friend *likes* you." She said with a chuckle after putting her pointer finger under Karl's chin to lift his face. Karl knew he was already starting to blush like crazy, realizing what Sapnap stopped himself from saying earlier.

"Tell them you're taken."

"No, no, he's str- uh, we're *both* straight. He was just-"

"Take a cowboy's hat, take a cowboy home." She said as she leaned back up upright, grabbing a rag to wipe down the counter.

"Take a what do *what*?!" Karl exclaimed, quickly hunching back over the bar when he realized how loudly he had asked that question.

"If you take a cowboy's hat, or he gives you his, it means that he's planning on taking you home. You know, '*save a horse, ride a cowboy*'?" She laughed, clearly finding Karl's lack of understanding and increasingly flushed complexion to be amusing.

"But, wait, he, but-"

"Take your beers and head back to your cowboy, cowboy." She winked, stepping away from Karl and making her way to the few other customers who had left mid-round to get more drinks.

Karl grabbed the beers and began heading back to Sapnap and his brothers in a daze. Sapnap must know the rule, he wouldn't have stopped Charlie otherwise. But why would he tell Karl to keep the hat on once Charlie was gone? Why didn't he want to be the one to tell him what it meant? If he explained to Karl that keeping his at on was just for his own sake, that would be one thing. So, why was he trying to hide it?

And why couldn't Karl identify the feeling he had about the situation now that he understood everything?

"Had me worried for a minute there, long line?" Sapnap asked, accepting the beer Karl had held out to him. Karl looked over Sapnap's shoulder to see Andrew smiling at him and Ben sitting on the barrier.

"Yeah, something like that." Karl mumbled, fiddling with the cap on his bottle. Sapnap took the bottle out of his hand, cracking it open like he had the first bottle and handing it back to Karl. Karl gave Sapnap a small smile, fiddling with the bottle again.

"No one else tried to give you a hat, did they?" Sapnap asked, his smile fading as he picked up on Karl's questionable mood.

"Oh, no, nothing like that." Karl rushed, reaching out to rest his hand on Sapnap's arm, pulling it away before he even touched Sapnap.

"Hey, is something wrong? Andrew and Ben are fine if you wanna get out of here for a while." Sapnap asked, reaching out to hold the hand Karl had withdrawn. Karl stared at their hands, remembering how it felt when they were running through the crowds, pressed together even when there was all the space in the world.

"The bartender told me what wearing a cowboy's hat means." Karl said blankly, unsure if Sapnap could even hear him over the roaring crowd. Karl only realized Sapnap heard what he said when he noticed a blush creeping onto his cheeks, which surely couldn't have been from the single beer.

"Oh, uh, she did, huh?" Sapnap asked, looking in the direction of the bar, slowly slipping his hand out of Karl's.

"Take a cowboy's hat, take a cowboy home. Isn't that right, cowboy?" Karl asked, leaning to the side so he would be in Sapnap's line of view again. Sapnap looked away again, taking a large sip of his drink.

"I mean, we're you *not* planning on coming home with me- uh, us... tonight?" Sapnap chuckled anxiously, rubbing the back of his neck.

"I guess that's true. You could've at least bought me dinner first or something." Karl said with a smile, nudging Sapnap's shoulder as he walked passed him, heading back up to the barrier.

"Are you hungry?" Sapnap asked instantly, following close behind. Karl felt comfort in the hand Sapnap placed on his lower back as soon as he was standing by his side again.

"Sap, it's just an expression." Karl laughed, letting himself lean a bit into Sapnap's side. He could feel Sapnap tense up a bit, soon relaxing into the embrace, adjusting his grip around Karl's waist to hold him closer.

"Of course. I knew that." Sapnap scoffed, tipping the front of his hat so it covered Karl's eyes. Karl quickly reached up to adjust the hat, giving Sapnap a glare as soon as he could see again. Sapnap had a beaming smile, looking up to Karl.

Karl rolled his eyes, looking out to the arena for the first time since he got back. As if it were fate, Charlie rode by on Delilah, tipping his hat with an obvious wink to Karl.

Karl looked over instantly to Sapnap, seeing him give the same glare to Charlie that he had given when he first saw him trying to give Karl his hat.

Now that Karl knew the meaning behind what being given a hat meant, he recognized the look in Sapnap's eyes as a mixture of jealousy and possessiveness. The rising feeling in Karl's chest was something he wasn't quite used to.

It felt like butterflies.

It was nice.

Chapter End Notes

okay so this essentially wraps up the possessive cowboy yeehaw boyfriend sapnap arc-
uuuuu i am very excited for the next arc to begin :) see you there on monday <3

Who are we?

Chapter Summary

Karl's drunken actions have Sapnap wondering if there's something Karl isn't telling him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Keys- hey, *keys*." Andrew said again, hitting Sapnap's arm. Sapnap was laughing about something he couldn't even remember anymore. He and Karl had somehow ended up at the bar for the last hour of the rodeo, talking about everything and nothing at the same time.

"You're so crabby, lighten up." Sapnap laughed, leaning a bit too far to the side to get his keys out of his back pocket. Sapnap nearly fell out of his stool, causing Karl to laugh and Andrew to face palm.

"You're drunk." Andrew sighed.

"*You're* drunk!" Karl said to Andrew, causing him and Sapnap to both burst out into laughter again.

"Help me with these idiots." Andrew grumbled, nudging Ben in Karl's direction, while he was pulling his older brother up by his arm. Ben much less aggressively helped Karl stand, walking closely beside him as the four made their way to the car.

"What the hell possessed you to get drunk?" Andrew muttered, pulling Sapnap along. Sapnap was looking over his shoulder, making Karl laugh every time he turned around.

"You're the one who said to go do whatever we wanted." Sapnap smiled up at Andrew, using his pointer finger to poke the tip of Andrew's nose. "I'm 21 and Karl is 23, you act like we're not allowed to drink." Sapnap laughed a bit, trying to turn around and get another glimpse at Karl.

"Yeah, I said that because I thought you'd go make out in the car or something, not make out at a *bar*." Andrew whispered, despite them being a decent enough distance ahead of Ben and Karl. Sapnap burst out laughing, leaning over and stumbling a bit to the side.

"We didn't even kiss, you're so dramatic." Sapnap said, finally standing up straight.

"I could hear you two flirting from our spot at the barrier- which is arguably *worse* than just making out in public." Andrew grumbled, grabbing onto Sapnap's arm again, pulling him towards the car.

"You're too tense, you know that?" Sapnap laughed, leaning against the door to the backseat, waiting for Andrew to unlock the door. Karl and Ben were still a bit behind, seeing that Ben wasn't nearly as persistent as Andrew.

"Maybe I'm just looking out for you." Andrew said under his breath, opening the car door. Sapnap reached up, preventing Andrew from opening the door all the way.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Sapnap asked, his laugh and smile soon falling flat. Andrew looked over to Ben and Karl, seeing Karl fully sat on the ground attempting to tie his shoe. Andrew caught Ben's eye, Ben shrugged before looking back to Karl.

"I've never seen you drunk before." Andrew said quietly, looking back to Sapnap.

Suddenly Sapnap felt like he was completely sober, seeing the mixture of fear and disappointment in his younger brother's eyes.

"Andy, I'm not like dad. I rarely ever drink to make sure I'll *never* end up like him. Today was just a special occasion. Even so, I'm sorry- really. I didn't even think about how you and Ben might feel about it." Sapnap admitted, leaning against the car. Even as Karl and Ben approached, Karl still laughing, Sapnap kept a straight face.

"It's okay, I know you're nothing like him." Andrew said, offering Sapnap a smile before pulling the door open the rest of the way and getting inside the car.

Sapnap closed the door for him, moving to the backseat. Karl practically fell into his seat at the same time Sapnap sat down, just coming down from whatever he was laughing about. Sapnap was still feeling much more sober from his conversation with Andrew.

Even so, he couldn't help but admire Karl's rosy cheeks and consistent smile. He reached over Karl, grabbing his seatbelt and bucking him in.

"I should take your hat more often if this is the treatment it gets me." Karl said in what he intended to be a whisper but came out at a regular volume. Sapnap smiled, looking away just in time to catch Andrew staring in the rearview mirror, his eyebrows raised.

"Touch my regular hat at home and you're *dead*." Sapnap said in an actual whisper, tapping the front of his hat so it covered Karl's eyes, making Karl laugh again.

Sapnap sat up in his own seat, pulling his seatbelt around himself. Karl pulled his seatbelt behind his chest, making it so he could lay down on the seat.

"No-

"*Please*?" Karl interrupted.

"Not a chance when *Andrew* is the one driving, I'd like you to get home in one piece." Sapnap said, laughing as soon as Andrew called out a rebuttal from the driver's seat. Sapnap helped Karl sit back up, wrapping the seatbelt around his chest again.

Karl grabbed onto Sapnap's t-shirt, still trying to plead with his eyes for Sapnap to let him lay down. Sapnap looked over Karl, adjusting his hat on Karl's head. Karl closed his eyes and smiled, releasing his grip on the fabric of Sapnap's shirt, letting his hands rest on his chest instead.

"We'll be home soon, you can lay down then." Sapnap practically mumbled, continuing to push hairs out of Karl's face. Karl turned away from him, pulling one of his hands away from Sapnap's chest to point at his cheek.

"Nick, I'm going to get on the highway in a minute, sit like a normal person." Andrew scolded from the front seat. Sapnap turned around briefly, seeing Andrew watching him in the mirror again, rolling his eyes with a smile before turning his attention back to the road.

"Andrew's right. Plus, there's nothing on your cheek, I don't know what you want." Sapnap

laughed, brushing his hand against Karl's cheek. He looked back to the front seat again to see Ben already fast asleep, his head resting against the window.

"Kiss me." Karl said with a smile, his volume only the slightest bit quieter than before. His eyes were still closed, his finger still pointing to his cheek.

"You're gonna be the death of me, you know that?" Sapnap said quietly, grabbing Karl's face in his hand, turning him so they were face to face. Karl squinted his eyes open with another small laugh, puckering his lips.

"Moron." Sapnap whispered, gently turning Karl's face to the side again so he could kiss his cheek.

To Sapnap's surprise, Karl turned his face at the last second, his kiss landing on the corner of Karl's mouth instead of his cheek.

"*Karl!*" Sapnap said in a surprised whisper, leaning back instantly. Karl immediately began laughing, slumping down in his seat.

"Nick, seriously. You're distracting me." Andrew warned, the smile on his face no longer present. Sapnap quickly sat back in his seat, facing forward, his heart pounding.

He nearly kissed Karl- Karl nearly kissed *him*.

Sapnap closed his eyes, resting his head against the back of his seat, trying desperately to remind himself that Karl was just drunk, that he was getting his hopes up for nothing. Karl's giggling quickly subsided, leaving the car silent.

A small metallic click was the only sound in the car, catching Sapnap's attention. Just as he lifted his head off the back of his seat, Karl slid into the middle seat, quickly buckling himself in before Sapnap could scold him.

"Ka-"

"Shh." Karl said, bringing a finger up to his smiling lips, then pointing to the front seat. Sapnap looked forward, Andrew finally seemed to have relaxed into driving and Ben was still sound asleep.

Karl took off his hat, setting it down in Sapnap's lap so he could rest his head on Sapnap's shoulder. Sapnap sighed, reaching his hand over to rest it on Karl's thigh. Karl placed one of his hands on the hand Sapnap had on his thigh, using his other to hug Sapnap's arm.

Sapnap closed his eyes as well, resting his head against the top of Karl's. Dusk was upon them, just the slightest bit of light left in the sky. Andrew had finally turned on some music, the last song Sapnap heard before he also fell asleep was K. by Cigarettes After Sex.

Chapter End Notes

Poor Andrew and Ben having to deal with their drunk asses

The spirit of the mountain

Chapter Summary

Karl confronts Sapnap about what he's been hiding

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"You wake them up, I don't want to."

"You stuck me with Karl on the walk to the car, *you* can wake them up."

"Karl was way less drunk than Nick-"

"No he-"

"Shut up." Sapnap spoke up from the back seat, rubbing his eye with one of his hands. He tried to stretch, quickly being halted by Karl sleeping soundly on his chest, both of his legs swung over his lap.

"Great, *you* can wake up Karl then." Andrew said with a sarcastic smile, turning off the car and tossing the key into the back seat. "Ben, help me get our stuff from the trunk." Andrew nudged Ben to get his attention, his stare still fixed on how Karl was wrapped around his older brother.

The two got out of their seats without another word, making their way to the back of the car. It was muffled, but Sapnap could still hear their conversation in passing.

"Is Nick really okay with Karl being all over him like-"

"Shut up, Ben."

"You're acting like I'm being homophobic or something. I mean, I'm fine with *you*, so obviously I'm fine with Karl-"

"*Ben!*"

"Relax, none of the lights are even on, it's not like anyone is going to hear me."

"It doesn't matter if-"

Sapnap blinked rapidly, watching as his brothers walked towards the front door, their conversation no longer in hearing range.

What the hell did Ben mean when he used being '*fine*' with Andrew as justification for not being homophobic?

"My head." Karl groaned quietly, pushing his face further into Sapnap's chest. Sapnap looked down, bringing up one hand to run through Karl's hair. To his surprise, Karl let out a small laugh, tilting his head back to look at him.

"Morning." Sapnap said with a smile, tending to Karl's bed head.

"What the hell did we do?" Karl asked with a laugh, looking around very confused.

"We got *quite* drunk, that's what we did. We're back at my parents' place now." Sapnap said, returning the laugh. "Come on, let's go inside." Sapnap tried leaning forward, quickly being stopped by Karl's protest.

"I'll literally cry if you make me stand up right now." Karl whined, wrapping his arms around Sapnap's shoulders again.

"Cry all you want, we've got tissues inside-"

"Sap, please?" Karl asked again, moving in small adjustments, trying to find a comfortable position again.

"Nope. Last time you said '*Sap, please*' I ended up with a \$200 tab because *someone* wanted to buy the entire bar a round." Sapnap laughed, leaning to the side to unbuckle himself and Karl. Sapnap opened his door, the sound of crickets interrupting the sweet silence of the car.

"Carry me?" Karl asked, leaning back to grab the car key before pulling himself into Sapnap's lap.

"*'Have a drink with me', 'kiss me', 'carry me.'*" Sapnap mocked, linking his arm behind Karl's knees. He stepped out of the car, lifting Karl bridal style as he stood, kicking the door shut behind him.

"Pfft, I didn't ask you to kiss me." Karl laughed, pulling himself up a bit.

"Yeah, you did. Said it loudly in front of both my brothers too." Sapnap rolled his eyes playfully, looking down to see Karl. He was a bit shocked to see Karl's face so red. He must've still been a bit drunk from earlier.

"Did you? You know, kiss me?" Karl asked.

Yeah, definitely still just a bit drunk.

"Well, I *tried* to kiss your cheek but you turned your face at the last second. I nearly kissed your lips. Don't worry, I didn't *actually* kiss you though. But really, first George, now me? Someone's a drunk homie hopper." Sapnap teased with a laugh, walking up the front steps and onto the porch.

"Why didn't you kiss me?" Karl asked, making Sapnap instantly stop laughing. Sapnap looked at the front door, immediately deciding to head over to the porch swing instead. He set Karl down on the swing, stepping away to lean against the railing.

"You were drunk- you're *still* drunk. I wouldn't kiss you when you were drunk." Sapnap explained, looking down to his shoes.

"But you'd kiss me if I were sober?" Karl pressed. Sapnap furrowed his brows looking up at Karl, surprised to see Karl looking away. It was almost like he was embarrassed about something.

"You're drunk-"

"Not anymore. Seriously." Karl interrupted, still refusing to look in Sapnap's direction. After a minute of Sapnap's continued silence, Karl finally looked him in the eyes.

"You didn't answer my question." Karl pushed himself off the swing, walking to stand at Sapnap's

side, facing towards the field.

"Why are you asking me that?" Sapnap deflected, taking a step away from Karl. He leaned against the railing so he would be facing Karl's profile. His deflection didn't seem to bother Karl, who was looking out at the twinkling lightning bugs dancing through the field.

"You didn't say you didn't want to kiss me in general. You specified you wouldn't kiss me when I'm *drunk*. So I'm asking you, would you kiss me when I'm sober?" Karl answered, picking at the splintered wood of the railing.

"Y-... You're looking too deep into it. I wasn't thinking about it that way when I said it." Sapnap lied, rubbing the back of his neck and facing towards the swing again. Normally Karl never picked up on the way he worded things, this was a first for him.

"Oh." Karl said simply, continuing to pick at the wood for a minute before pushing himself up to stand straight, turning towards the front door.

"Karl-" Sapnap cut himself off. He had no idea what had come over him, but he felt like his answer somehow disappointed or upset Karl.

"You're a bad liar." Karl said quietly, walking past Sapnap. Sapnap instantly reached out, grabbing onto Karl's arm. Karl stayed facing away but stopped his pace.

"What's going on with you?" Sapnap asked under his breath.

"I could ask you the same thing." Karl answered, not turning around.

"What's going on with *me* is that I'm confused how we went from laughing in the car to you calling me a *liar* and trying to walk away." Sapnap answered, releasing his grip on Karl's arm. He was relieved when Karl didn't continue walking away.

"You're my best friend. I *know* when you're lying to me. Normally I brush it off, reminding myself that I'm not entitled to knowing everything about you. But this involves *both* of us, so I was really hoping you'd be honest this time." Karl answered, his voice completely steady, to Sapnap's surprise.

Karl hated any form of conflict, so the fact he was not only initiating this conversation but also being so direct was extremely out of character for him.

"What do you want to know? What do you want me to say?" Sapnap asked, facing the field. His heart was pounding out of his chest, but something seemed to click for him.

It was time he stopped hiding who he was from Karl, how he *felt* about him. The conversation was long overdue and Sapnap knew that Karl was right- the situation involves him, so he deserves to understand it in its entirety.

"I want you to tell me what you think of me. Tell me what I am to you." Karl said, turning around and standing behind Sapnap.

Sapnap shut his eyes, taking a deep breath before beginning.

... oof

Father sun, mother moon

Chapter Summary

Sapnap tells Karl about the feelings he has for him

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"You're a ray of light. When we hug, I feel like I'm holding the sun. You bring me warmth and comfort. I can go to bed every night knowing you'll be there when I wake up to make each day brighter. You're the sun, Karl. You're *my* sun. That's what I think of you. *That's* what you are to me."

"How can you-"

"I know it's not what you want to hear. And I know that you can't return the feeling, so I'm not expecting anything from you. I just... I can't keep *lying* to you. I can't keep letting myself indulge in this fantasy I have that maybe everything we do is because you feel something for me too. I just have a hard time getting that through my thick skull, and I'm sorry." Sapnap sighed, continuing to stare over the railing of the porch. Silence ensued between them, the sounds of nightlife filling the void.

"You're my best friend. I want you to know that isn't going to change, no matter what. Our friendship has always been enough for me. *You* have always been enough for me." Sapnap spoke again, finally turning to face Karl. The shock and confusion on Karl's face was about as much as he expected. When Karl didn't speak, Sapnap faced the field once more.

"I won't be upset if you leave. I won't even be upset if you never want to talk to me-"

"If I'm the sun, then you're the moon." Karl interrupted. Sapnap started to look over his shoulder, stopping himself before his gaze reached Karl. He sighed, looking at the old wooden floorboards before facing away again.

"Karl, you don't have to say-"

"You're the brightest light in a dark room. You're like my own personal recharge station. No matter what's going on in my life, no matter how busy or burnt out I feel, I always have the energy to talk to you. You never fail to calm me down, you're the most consistent thing in my life. You're... my moon." Sapnap kept his gaze away from Karl, the tears already stinging in his eyes from hearing what Karl had to say about him. Even so, Sapnap was waiting to hear the one word he knew was coming next.

"*But?*" Sapnap continued Karl's thought for him when the silence became too much to bear.

"But.. I've never thought of us... I've never thought of a *guy*... in that way." Karl said regretfully. Sapnap was expecting a hand on his shoulder or a hug from behind. The only movement made behind him was the creaking sound of Karl sitting on the porch swing.

"I can drive you to the airport tomorrow, or I'm sure Jen can if-"

"What- I'm not *leaving*." Karl interrupted, the squeak of the swing coming to an abrupt halt. Sapnap sighed, facing Karl once the tears in the corners of his eyes had finally stopped welling.

"Karl, I just dropped a huge bomb on you. You need time-

"I don't *ever* need time away from-

"Maybe *I* need time, okay?" Sapnap interrupted. He regretted the words that lingered and stung the tip of his tongue as soon as he spoke them. He regretted them because of the broken look on Karl's face, but he also knew they were true.

The hollow feeling in his chest only grew with every passing second he spent staring at Karl. He couldn't feel like this for four more days.

"But- but I'm your sun? You're my fucking moon or whatever-" Karl's face had become red around his cheeks and nose. Unfortunately not a blush, but a sign that tears would soon roll down his delicate features. "Don't tell me to leave." Karl spoke in a near whisper, facing his lap once the first tear escaped.

"Karl." Sapnap spoke his name through a sigh, bringing his hands up to rub his face. He didn't have time to even react to the sound of the swing squeaking before he felt Karl's hands on his own, pulling them away from his face.

"Don't say my name like that. I hate disappointing you." Karl said quietly. The space between them, which would have normally been considered typical, now felt like there wasn't enough air for them both to breathe.

"You don't get it. Being like *this*-" Sapnap said while nodding his head to the small space between them, seeing that Karl was still holding his hands. "This kills me, Karl. You're so close but you've never felt further away."

Sapnap didn't hold himself back from taking one of his hands out of Karl's, bringing it to Karl's cheek, using his thumb to wipe residual tears into his skin. Karl placed his hand on Sapnap's, looking over his face with desperation in his eyes.

"We could- I mean... What if we... try?" Karl said with a questioning tone, clearly hoping Sapnap would understand the vague pitch without further explanation.

"Karl, *no*-"

"It's not like I've never, I don't know, kissed a guy before or something. Granted it was just George and we were drunk, but maybe that means I could be with-"

"Karl, the last thing I want is for you to force yourself to be something you're not. Just, give me some time. I just.. need a little.." Words were failing to come to his mind. Sapnap's eyes seemed to be glued to Karl's lips. He wanted nothing more than to kiss their quiver away.

"Sap." Karl whispered, his face leaning more heavily into Sapnap's hand. He looked angelic. Blue eyes sparking in the moonlight, dark lashes still clinging together from his tears.

Sapnap took a shaky breath in, trying to remember his stance in the situation. Karl didn't want this. He was just afraid of what the future might hold now that everything was up in the air.

But if he didn't want this, why was he looking at him like *that*?

Sapnap paused before saying anything, trying to focus on his breathing. Karl had somehow taken a step forward without him noticing. The hand he had resting against Sapnap's chest acted as further encouragement.

"Karl, I need you to stop me." Sapnap said through an exhale, finding his hand guiding Karl's face down to his own. His other hand already found its way to Karl's waist, gently pulling him against his chest.

Karl allowed himself to be pressed against Sapnap. This was a position they had been in countless times before, yet it had never had more hesitancy behind it, like this was the first time they had ever held one another so closely, so intimately.

"Seriously. Stop me." Sapnap whispered, his lips already grazing Karl's as he spoke. Even just the small friction was enough to send waves of electricity through his body. The hand he had resting on Karl's cheek slowly moved back through his hair, pulling him in.

"I don't want to lose you." Karl whispered, gently pressing his lips against Sapnap's before either of them had the chance to pull away.

Sapnap was at war with himself. He felt like this was better than anything else he had experienced in his life. He also felt guilty and shameful, now knowing for *certain* that Karl didn't want this- he just didn't want to lose him.

To Sapnap, this kiss was everything. All the love he had harbored in secret since his first time ever meeting Karl, had finally come to fruition. It felt *right*. It felt like he finally understood why every other kiss in his life seemed like something was missing- because they weren't with Karl.

Sapnap wasn't even sure when he pulled away, but Karl didn't let much space develop between them. It wasn't more than a few seconds of their lips being separated before Karl leaned in again. Sapnap could feel the tears in his eyes returning as he forced himself to pull apart their lips once more.

"Wha-"

"You don't want this." Sapnap interrupted. He leaned back against the porch railing, pulling his arms to his sides, and looking away from Karl in hopes it would hide his tears.

"Maybe I don't know what I want." Karl somewhat admitted, standing closer to Sapnap. Sapnap put his hand up, pressing it against Karl's chest so he couldn't come any closer.

"Well, I do. I know that I want you. I want to *be* with you. I know that even though I'm fucking crying and I pushed you away, that was still the best kiss of my life. I know exactly how I feel and that's how I *know* you don't want this." Sapnap explained, using the cuff of his sleeve to frantically wipe the tears that spilled down his cheeks.

"Nick-"

"You don't need to '*Nick*' me. I just need some time, some *space*. Please, Karl." Sapnap interrupted, stepping around Karl and heading inside before he even had time to respond.

..... lol remember when I said this book wouldn't have angst

Once upon a time, there was a player

Chapter Summary

Sapnap and Karl talk things over

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It wasn't how Karl looked that made Sapnap fall in love with him. It wasn't even the way he could stare for hours at Karl's ocean blue eyes glistening in the sun. It wasn't the way his hair flowed through a warm spring breeze with wild brunette waves framing his face. It wasn't even the way the apples of his cheeks rose into a smile whenever Karl looked at him that made Sapnap fall in love.

Sapnap fell in love with him the first time Karl held him. When two arms wrapped around him and suddenly he felt whole for the first time in his life. When he knew the only warmth he would ever need was found in Karl's arms. The way Karl held him and apologized for every little thing that ever caused him pain in the past, even though he didn't know him then.

Sapnap fell in love with Karl in that embrace and he can never go back.

But now, he was feeling something he couldn't even name, a feeling he had never experienced before.

Sometimes, it feels like you're standing in the ocean.

You're standing in the ocean and there's this giant wave coming right at you.

The water is being sucked towards the wave, making it even harder to stand your ground- ground made of sand and broken shells that can hardly support you as is.

The wave is growing. It's the biggest you've ever seen. It's your first tidal wave.

Even while the rest of humanity flees from the wave, packing their lives into impossibly small cars, you stay put.

You stay put while fathers strap children into car seats and mothers grab family photos from homes they know will no longer be there once the wave crashes, washing everything out to sea.

You stay put because you're not afraid. You're not worried. You know you aren't going to be sucked into the wave.

"Sap?"

The wave is growing, getting closer even. But it feels like a glitch, like your visuals are on a continuous loop. Like there is no way it could ever reach you. Even with the water around you being pulled into the ever growing wave, the sea level remains the same.

"Sapnap?"

Maybe the wave isn't even real.

"I know you're awake. *Please*, talk to me."

Maybe you're just standing in the ocean.

Sapnap rolled over in his bed, looking up slowly to see Karl kneeling beside him. Even with just the minuscule amount of light from the moon shining in through the windows, Sapnap could see the tear stains on Karl's face.

He didn't speak, instead choosing to reach over and run his thumb along Karl's cheek. His thumb glided across the dampened skin as Karl's eyes fluttered shut, the weight of his head leaning into Sapnap's hand. Sapnap felt like he was having *deja vu* from their time on the porch.

"I wish I knew how I felt. I-I wish I wasn't-"

"Shh." Sapnap interrupted once he felt a fresh hot tear bring warmth back to Karl's cheek. He pulled his hand away, causing Karl's eyes to open in a panic. Sapnap moved over in the bed silently, pulling down the duvet.

"I can't do that to you-"

"You're crying, Karl. Let me hold you while you cry." Sapnap assured him. He could see another wave of tears gliding down Karl's cheeks, each one catching a small amount of light. Even when he cried, Karl was still the most beautiful person Sapnap had ever seen.

Karl lifted himself off the floor, climbing into the bed slowly. Sapnap hushed him, wrapping both arms around Karl to pull him to his chest. Karl had both his arms scrunched in front of him, his hands covering his face while he continued to cry. Sapnap rubbed circles on his back, pulling the blanket over them both.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have even said anything. The last thing I wanted was to hurt you." Sapnap said quietly. He could only hope that his words could bring Karl some form of comfort. Tears were welling in his own eyes once he felt Karl wrap his arms around his torso, burying his face into his chest.

"You're not the one who's supposed to be apologizing right now." Karl said through a snuffle. "For fuck's sake, you were honest and vulnerable with me and I made you *cry*- and now I'm here, crying to you. I'm the one who should apologize. I *came here* to apologize." Karl started to cry harder, his fist tightening around the fabric of Sapnap's shirt.

"Shh. It's alright, *το μωρό μου*. Don't worry about me." Sapnap hushed him in a whisper, knowing Karl wouldn't understand the pet name that slipped passed his tongue. He also hoped Karl wouldn't notice the tears that were rolling off his cheeks and onto the top of his head. "Don't cry for-" Sapnap's voice cracked.

He closed his eyes as more tears slipped out. Sapnap tightened his arms around Karl once he felt him pull back, ultimately letting go once Karl continued to push away.

Sapnap kept his eyes closed, pleading for them to stop watering. Karl reached his hand up, wiping away the tears like Sapnap did for him. Sapnap brought a hand up to his face, holding it over Karl's, while opening his eyes in slow blinks.

He pulled Karl's hand away from his face, kissing the back of it lightly before intertwining their fingers. He watched the small spark of hope return to Karl's eyes as he tightened his grip.

"What's going to happen to us?" Sapnap asked under his breath, looking up and blinking quickly, hoping the remaining tears in his eyes wouldn't fully develop.

"I meant it when I said I'm willing to try-"

"Karl-"

"I'm *serious*. I mean, how different could it be?" Karl insisted. Whether it was intentional or just second nature, Karl moved closer to Sapnap, their faces only inches apart.

"*Karl*." Sapnap said again. Karl looked like he had so much more to say but bit his tongue for Sapnap's sake. "You don't want this. You said it yourself that you just didn't want to lose me- lose me as a *friend*." Sapnap continued, pulling their hands apart. He brushed Karl's hair out of his face, so he could have an unobstructed view of the first person he ever fell in love with.

"*This* is what I want. I want to be able to lay with you, hold your hands, make you smile and laugh- make you *happy*." Karl laid his head down on the pillow as well, closing his eyes while Sapnap continued to stroke his hair. "I don't want to get used to anyone else running their fingers through my hair." Karl finished, leaning forward so their foreheads were touching.

"But this is what *friendship* looks like to you. Relationships are more than just being affectionate with each other-"

"It's not *just affection* to me. It's being comfortable with you, feeling safe with you... Maybe it's not a coincidence that I'm my happiest when I'm with you." Karl finished, pulling away so he could see Sapnap's eyes.

"I guess what I'm saying is, when it comes to everything else in a relationship... I don't *not* want it. I'll admit I wasn't really prepared for kissing you to be so... to *feel* so..." Karl paused, reaching up and taking Sapnap's hand out of his hair. "So... normal?" Karl sighed shakily, looking to Sapnap briefly before rolling over to lay on his back, holding Sapnap's hand tightly to his chest. "So, I don't know, *right*?" He finished.

Sapnap propped himself up on his side, staring at Karl in complete disbelief. He could feel his heart racing out of his chest, his mind replaying that one word on repeat. Karl also thought it felt *right*.

"Don't look at me like that." Karl said with a small smile, his eyes still looking a bit worried. "You're staring at me like I just grew a second head." Karl faced away for a second before looking back.

"This isn't the time to fuck with me, Karl." Sapnap said wearily, wishing he had the willpower to pull his hand off of Karl's chest. Karl faced him instantly, propping himself on his elbow also.

"I'd never mess with your feelings." Karl reassured him, looking over Sapnap's features. "I just... I just don't know *what* or *how much* I can give you." Karl admitted, looking away again.

"Karl, we don't have to do this. I meant it when I said if you just give me some time, I can work on trying to get over-"

"I don't *want* you to get over me- not when we don't know if *this* is really possible or not." Karl interrupted, only stealing a glance in Sapnap's direction. "I'm going to need a lot of time and patience, but don't give up before we try. Don't give up on *me*." Karl finished, closing his eyes and laying back down.

"I won't." Sapnap whispered, brushing the back of his fingers against Karl's cheek. Karl leaned into his touch, a faint smile on his face.

Chapter End Notes

so much of the angst is already resolved- you can stop coming for my throat now lmao

also, the pet name is 'my baby' in greek (if you speak greek, fair warning the next chapters may be very bad because i do *not* speak greek and everything is just translated using google lmao

Sometimes very beautiful indeed

Chapter Summary

Karl explains how he perceives his sexuality

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"When did you know you liked-... How did you-..." Karl started, making Sapnap open his eyes from his near sleep. "Am I the first guy you've had feelings for?" Karl finally settled on. Sapnap could tell by his restless tone that Karl was still unsatisfied with how his question came out.

"No, you're not the first." Sapnap said slowly. He was expecting this to provide comfort to Karl, seeing that it seemed like Karl was feeling some sort of responsibility for Sapnap's 'gay awakening'. Instead, Karl remained in tense silence.

"Have you ever even... *been* with a guy before?" Karl asked, his face staying painfully still, staring up at Sapnap's slow moving ceiling fan.

"Not *officially*." Sapnap admitted, rolling to lay on his back and watching the fan spin lazily with Karl. "But I've known I was gay since I was 12, it's not something I've questioned in a long time." Sapnap continued.

This seemed to catch Karl's attention, pulling his eyes away from the ceiling until he was fully looking at Sapnap.

"You're *gay*?" Karl asked, in complete shock. For some reason, Sapnap didn't feel as comforted by Karl's disbelief as he had Andrew's.

"What gave it away? The part where I kissed you or-"

"All this time- all the girls you've been with- it didn't mean *anything* to you?" Karl pushed the conversation in a direction Sapnap was really hoping he could avoid- at least for tonight. All Karl's tiredness seemed to have dissipated, as he propped himself up on his elbow, staring down at Sapnap.

"I wouldn't say it meant *nothing*. I enjoyed getting to know them, but I just never thought about them the way I knew they thought about me." Sapnap looked over to Karl, not feeling the same burst of energy Karl seemed to have.

"Well, if it didn't mean nothing, then that means it had to have meant *something*, right? Yeah, maybe, I don't know, you're not-"

"Are you trying to imply because I *forced* myself to date girls so I wouldn't get outted and harassed- or *worse*, that means *maybe* I'm not gay?" Sapnap leaned away from Karl, finding himself to be more offended by the assumption than he expected to be. It would be one thing if his dad reacted this way, but *Karl*?

"No- I mean... Sorry, I guess this isn't really about *you*." Karl spoke quietly, fully sitting up and

respecting the space Sapnap created between them.

"What do you mean this isn't about *me*?" Sapnap asked, sitting up in the bed as well. Karl had kept his face down, one hand hanging onto a fistful of his hair. "Karl, if you're not talking about me, are you talking about yourself?" Sapnap asked, reaching over and gently pulling Karl's hand out of his hair.

"It's *normal* to feel... excited... to see your friends, regardless of gender." Karl said as if he was trying to get Sapnap's approval.

"Yeah?" Sapnap answered, leaning away from Karl to rest his back against the headboard.

"Yeah... It's *normal* when sometimes, certain *friends* hold your hand or put an arm around your waist, and you get that fluttering feeling in your stomach... regardless of gender." Karl paused, looking over to Sapnap. Based on Sapnap's confused facial expression, Karl felt the need to clarify. "Because you're just *excited* to spend time with them- because they're your friend." Karl was nodding, hoping that Sapnap would agree.

"Okay?" Sapnap said slowly, unable to hide his puzzled expression.

"Yeah, okay. And getting a little- well, *angry* can't be the right word, but- *you know*, when a friend you really like spending time with starts dating someone and suddenly they're not holding your hand or laying in bed with you anymore. It's *normal* to feel upset by that, anyone would be." Karl justified, again looking to Sapnap for approval.

"Karl-"

"I just mean-"

"Not everyone thinks that way, Karl." Sapnap interrupted, placing a hand on the knee Karl had pulled to his chest. The only way to describe the way Karl was looking at Sapnap was like the earth beneath his feet had crumbled.

"But-"

"When Tina was dating that one guy a few months ago, did you feel what you were just describing?" Sapnap asked, watching intently as Karl's face repeatedly tensed and relaxed, like he was really considering the question.

"A little, yeah." Karl shrugged, looking over to Sapnap quickly before diverting his gaze again.

"What about when Corpse and his girlfriend got together?" Sapnap continued. Karl made the same expressions as before.

"I mean, maybe, but I don't see what the point-"

"How about when I was dating Rose last year?" Sapnap interrupted. Karl quickly cut himself off, looking down. Sapnap noticed that Karl didn't shift through various emotions again, like he didn't even need to think about his answer.

"Yes. Very." Karl may as well have been whispering, the sound of his voice was nearly drowned out by the whirling air conditioning.

"Karl-"

"It was like I had all your attention all the time and we had *finally* made a breakthrough! I really thought we were getting so comfortable with each other, but then next time I saw you, all you talked about was '*Rose this*' and '*Rose that*'." Karl had thrown his hands in the air, gesturing while he talked.

"It felt like you replaced me." Karl admitted after a moment of silence passed.

"That's because I was trying to." Sapnap said quietly, even though he knew it was the last thing Karl wanted to hear.

"What?" Karl's voice sounded completely heartbroken.

"It's become a... *defense mechanism* of sorts over the years. Whenever there's a guy I like, I just do the complete opposite. I find a girl to date and I make sure all my conversations with the guy I *actually* like are about the person I'm dating, so that way he won't know that I like him." Sapnap closed his eyes while he explained, never having had to justify his logic aloud before.

Karl remained silent and Sapnap was terrified to open his eyes. Whether he intended to or not, he had just admitted that he has had feelings for Karl for over a year now.

"It sounds horrible, explaining it- actually *hearing* myself say that." Sapnap sighed, running his hand through his hair. "I'm not saying it was the right thing to do, I'm just saying it's what I did." Sapnap finished, finally looking over to Karl.

"Do you have any idea how much those 5 months *sucked* for me?" Karl asked, a surprisingly dry laugh following his question. "All I thought about was how shitty of a friend I must be that I was *begging* the universe for you two to break up. And it turns out you were only with her- you were only acting like *that*, because you actually liked *me*?" Karl questioned, looking back at Sapnap.

Sapnap felt like he was failing to grasp what should have been a straightforward question. He found himself picking anxiously at his cuticles, wincing once he had picked his skin completely raw.

"I never claimed it was the *best* idea I ever had." Sapnap practically muttered, bringing his sore finger to his mouth. Sapnap froze, the sudden realization of exactly what Karl had just admitted finally registering.

"Wait, you *wanted* me and Rose to break up?" Sapnap clarified. Karl hesitated for a second before nodding slowly. "But, why? Even when I was dating her, sometimes I'd still lay with you and-"

"I guess it made me realize I don't like sharing." Karl interrupted. "Well, I don't like sharing when it comes to *you*." Karl looked away despite the glowing moon exposing the redness blooming across his cheeks.

"You were *jealous*." Sapnap said slowly, leaning forward. He lifted his hand off Karl's knee, placing it under his chin instead. He turned Karl's face towards him slowly, watching intently as Karl's eyes seemed to look anywhere but at him.

"Maybe. I don't know." Karl said quietly, continuing to look away.

"What other... *normal* friend feelings have you had about me?" Sapnap asked, his curiosity getting the best of him.

"Are you really going to make me say it out loud?" Karl asked in a mutter.

"You don't *have* to say anything, but I am *asking* that you do." Sapnap continued. He found his hand sliding slowly from under Karl's chin to rest peacefully on his heated cheek.

"I like... watching you." Karl said quietly, sinking down to lay in the bed again. Sapnap mirrored his movements, laying on his side so they were face to face.

"You like watching me." Sapnap repeated.

"I've always thought you were attractive... and I like watching when you blush from me saying that." Karl paused in the middle of his sentence, briefly looking Sapnap in the eyes before looking away again. "I like looking at things I find beautiful." Karl's eyes flicked to Sapnap's lips for less than a second before returning to his gaze.

"You think I'm beautiful?" Sapnap asked in a breathy whisper. His instinct to turn away and hide the blush creeping onto his face was overpowered by the trance Karl had seemed to put him in.

"It's *normal* to think that about your friends." Karl attempted to justify.

"Like how it's *normal* to want them to not be in a relationship with anyone else?" Sapnap asked. Just as Karl was about to nod in agreement, he caught on that Sapnap was gently prodding at the fact that those feelings were indeed *not* normal.

The silence in the room was interrupted by the air conditioner kicking back on, the sound of whirling air filling the room. Sapnap noticed that Karl's gaze seemed to be fixed on his lips at this point.

"Does this mean... Am I..." Karl's stuttered breath cut himself off, as he reached forward, running his thumb across Sapnap's bottom lip.

"This doesn't mean you're gay, if that's what you were going to ask. But... It does mean you're not straight." Sapnap clarified, reaching out to hold onto Karl's wrist.

"Oh." Karl almost seemed a bit shocked.

"Yeah." Sapnap said softly, rubbing his thumb along the back of Karl's hand.

"So... It's *not* normal friend behavior that I really want to kiss you right now?" Karl asked, his eyes finally flicking up to meet Sapnap's.

"*Normal* is whatever you make of it." Sapnap said softly, bringing himself closer to Karl. He moved slowly, his eyes now being drawn to Karl's lips, no longer able to maintain eye contact. Karl met him halfway, leaning forward to connect their lips.

Chapter End Notes

soooo, yeah. Karl was never straight. He just always assumed everyone had the same thoughts he did, which meant he was straight. As for what his sexuality is now that he understands that straight people don't have those thoughts about same sex friends- he doesn't really know. I'm going to say he's unlabeled for now, but he's somewhere in the bisexual/pansexual category, seeing that he does feel like he's had meaningful relationships with women in the past.

And the player was a new human

Chapter Summary

Sapnap and Karl get closer (I'm sorry idek how to summarize chapters anymore)

Chapter Notes

a/n: Sapnap is half Greek. His paternal side of the family is from Greece! He's said on streams that he can speak a bit of Greek, but he was more fluent as a kid (since he doesn't use it as much anymore). This is why Sapnap has been calling Karl pet names in Greek :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The night felt as though it was moving by especially slowly, as if the world was giving them extra time in each other's arms. The moon dug its heels into the sky, prolonging their safety in the dark shield midnight provided.

"Wait- wait." Karl said quietly, finally breaking the kiss. The kiss that started so long ago, it'd be impossible to tell if it had been a minute or an hour.

"What's wrong? Are you alright?" Sapnap asked instantly. He leaned his face away from Karl's, running his hand gently across Karl's flushed cheek.

"Yes. No... I'm not sure, honestly." Karl said quietly. He brought the hand he had resting on Sapnap's chest up to his face, holding onto Sapnap's hand, which was caressing his cheek.

"Shit, this was too much. This was *way* too-"

Karl cut Sapnap off by leaning forward, connecting their lips again. This kiss was much sweeter, much more gentle than the last. It was a kiss that brought comfort and security.

"Us... *this*... isn't why I'm freaking out. I just... It feels like everything's different now, like I was looking at the world wrong my whole life and now that I can see things more clearly... It's going to take some getting used to." Karl said quietly, his eyes flickering between Sapnap's.

"Okay. That's perfectly okay." Sapnap said slowly, pulling Karl to his chest. He could only imagine how Karl was feeling. He had known since before he was a teenager who he liked and what it meant. For Karl to just be understanding that he's probably had views like this his whole life and never noticed- it sounded like a distressing reality to be in.

Karl wrapped his arms around Sapnap's torso, pushing his face into Sapnap's chest.

"What does this feel like for you?" Karl asked, practically under his breath.

"It feels like you need a haircut." Sapnap said with a small laugh, rubbing his chin on the top of Karl's head. Sapnap was relieved when Karl giggled at his lame joke. The atmosphere had felt

heavy for so long, Sapnap figured they could both benefit from some harmless humor.

"Really though. I'm trying to understand this- understand *myself* better. So, what are you thinking about when we lay like this?" Karl asked again. His voice was still quiet, but no longer in a timid way. It seemed more like he was just finally relaxed.

"I'm thinking the same thing I always think when we lay together... that I can't believe this is happening." Sapnap said, leaning back a bit to smile at Karl.

"Be serious. We lay like this all the time, why wouldn't you be able to believe it?" Karl asked, rolling his eyes with a small headshake. Even Karl's dismissal couldn't take the smile off Sapnap's face.

"I *am* serious. I feel so lucky every time I get to hold you." Sapnap answered, brushing a few hairs out of Karl's face. "Now I'm thinking about how special I feel, knowing I'm the only one who you let touch your hair." Sapnap continued, trailing his fingers against Karl's scalp.

"Yeah?" Karl had closed his eyes and Sapnap could tell Karl was finally ready to fall asleep.

"I'm thinking about how grateful I am that you're in my life, that you flew halfway across the country to surprise me, that you endured a *rodeo* to appease my family." Sapnap said with a light laugh, watching Karl scrunch up his features and laugh a few times himself.

"You're cheesy." Karl tried to say in a taunt, but a yawn escaped in the middle.

"Yeah, says the guy who remembers the dates of all the times I kissed him." Sapnap said quietly, leaning down and kissing Karl's cheek gently before laying his head back down on the pillow.

"Whatever." Karl grumbled. Even with his sour tone, Sapnap could still see the faint smile on his lips, sleep quickly approaching.

"I'm thinking there's no one else I'd rather be laying with or holding like this. There's no one else I'd rather have holding *me*." Sapnap said in a whisper, drawing little shapes onto Karl's back.

"That's what I've been thinking too." Karl said sleepily, shifting to the side so Sapnap had more space to trail his fingers across his back.

"Sleep." Sapnap whispered again, kissing Karl's forehead gently, his fingers slowing down on Karl's back. Karl's breaths had become slower and deeper, his face finally completely relaxed. Sapnap closed his eyes, scooching closer to Karl in the bed now that he was sleeping.

Sapnap was asleep in a minute, his heart never having felt more full, more *whole*, in his entire life.

Sapnap tried squeezing his eyes shut, shrugging off the hand pushing on his shoulder. He tightened his grip around Karl, pulling him back to his chest.

"Fuck off." Sapnap groaned into Karl's back.

"Don't tell me to *fuck off* after everything I did for you yesterday. Now, unless you want anyone *else* to see you two, get up." Andrew said in an annoyed whisper, continuing to shake Sapnap's shoulder.

"Sap?" Karl asked in a mumble, rolling over to face Sapnap, clearly also resisting being woken up.

"Go back to sleep *μωπό μου*." Sapnap whispered, pulling himself away from Karl. His room was

still rather dark, a light rain tapping against his window. "What time even is it?" Sapnap asked through a yawn, rubbing his eyes.

He sat up slowly in the bed, moving to the edge. Karl seemed to follow him, still cuddling against him despite already being back to sleep.

"It's 8:30." Andrew said quietly, looking increasingly confused between his older brother and Karl. "It's Sunday. Jen wants us all to go to church. We leave at 9, so you two need to hurry up before they send someone else to come get you." Andrew warned.

Sapnap groaned loudly, causing Karl to grumble and stir in the bed next to him.

"You can't be serious. She really thinks either of us packed *church* clothes?" Sapnap dropped his head into his hand. He reached his other hand back, running it through Karl's hair. Karl leaned into his touch, tilting his face to the side and kissing Sapnap's hand.

"Please tell me I dreamt you saying we were going to church-" Karl cut himself off, leaning away from Sapnap as soon as he saw Andrew was in the room with them.

"Sorry- I, uh, thought you were... a pillow?" Karl forced out a laugh, sitting up in the bed and creating space between them.

"Pfft." Andrew couldn't hold back his laugh from hearing Karl's poorly thought out excuse. Sapnap, as much as he wanted to glare or even throw something at his brother, also couldn't help but laugh.

"It's fine, don't worry about Andrew." Sapnap said with a smile, extending his hand back to Karl. Karl looked at it hesitantly, soon intertwining his fingers with Sapnap's, allowing Sapnap to pull him back to his side.

Karl instantly melted back into his place against Sapnap, holding onto his arm. It was strange in a way, that even before last night, this still would've been a typical morning for them.

"That doesn't mean you can fall back asleep, *μωρό μου*." Sapnap whispered, rubbing Karl's shoulder once he realized he had already closed his eyes again. Karl let out a small groan, sitting back up straight, their hands still held together.

"So..." Andrew started, clearly struggling to keep his eyes only on his brother. Sapnap raised an eyebrow when Andrew's eyes flicked between him and Karl once more.

"Γιατί τον λες έτσι? (Greek to English translation: Why are you calling him that?)" Andrew asked, taking Sapnap off guard for a moment.

"Τι? Το μωρό μου? (Greek to English translation: What? My baby?)" Sapnap asked back in Greek. He looked over to Karl, smiling from seeing his confusion. It looked like Karl couldn't tell if they were actually speaking another language or if he was still just half asleep.

"Ξέρει τι σημαίνει? (Greek to English translation: Does he know what it means?)" Andrew questioned further. Karl squeezed Sapnap's hand, catching his attention with furrowed brows.

"μωρό μου. (Greek to English translation: My baby.)" Sapnap repeated, facing Karl. "Andrew wants to know if *you* know that I've been calling you '*my baby*' in Greek." Sapnap laughed a bit, leaning over and kissing the side of Karl's head.

Karl slowly turned to Sapnap, a blush already forming on his cheeks. Even though he didn't know

before, Karl still ended up nodding his head that he did understand what it meant.

"Oh thank *god*. Watching you hopelessly pine after him was getting embarrassing." Andrew sighed, taking a step back to sit on Sapnap's desk.

"He *knew*?" Karl instantly asked, staring wide-eyed at Sapnap.

"Yeah, I told him- and hey you little shit, it wasn't *embarrassing*." Sapnap rolled his eyes.

"You're right. It was *super* embarrassing." Andrew laughed, fiddling with a few of the random trinkets on Sapnap's desk.

Now that he was more awake, Sapnap reached over and threw a pillow at Andrew, which he easily caught and threw back. Sapnap tried grabbing another pillow to throw, but the sound of footsteps ascending the staircase to his room caught all their attention.

Sapnap slid off the edge of the bed, sitting on the floor in front of Karl, just as a few knocks echoed through the door.

Chapter End Notes

Andrew's selfless work of being the world's most patient wingman has finally paid off

Again, please forgive my Greek- it's primarily just google translate

Made from nothing but milk and love

Chapter Summary

Karl and Sapnap get ready for church

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Come in!" Sapnap said after a second, looking over his shoulder at Karl. Karl gave him a small smile, sitting cross legged on the bed.

"Hope everyone's- oh, come on." Jen sighed, opening the door. She brought a hand to her face, shaking it slowly. "Boys, get *up*. Come on, upsidaisy." Jen said, tapping Andrew's shoulder so he would stand and holding out a hand to help Sapnap up.

"Karl and I don't *actually* have to go to church though, right? Andrew's just trying to trick us into going so he won't be alone?" Sapnap asked hopefully, accepting the help standing up.

"I can't *make* you go, but yes, I am asking that you and Karl join us this morning. No one there has seen you in over a year, and I *may* have told some people you'd be in town this week." Jen tried to sound excited.

"Of course you did." Sapnap groaned, running his hands through his hair. "Karl's not even Catholic." Sapnap said quietly to Jen, despite Andrew and Karl both still being in the room with them.

"I mean, I was raised Catholic? I was, like, baptized as a baby and got confirmed when I was in high school." Karl shrugged, standing from the bed. Sapnap turned around giving him a defeated look, like he was hoping Karl would let that be their ticket out. As soon as Karl noticed Sapnap's gaze, he realized he ruined the plan.

"Perfect! Okay, everyone get dressed! We're leaving in, oh god, 15 minutes. Put some pep in your step boys." Jen said, leaving the room and calling out to Marisol.

"*What are you talking about? Of course I was raised Catholic! Want me to say some Hail Marys to prove it?*" Sapnap mocked Karl, gently pushing him back onto the bed. Karl started laughing, realizing that he really did ruin the perfect escape plan.

"Looks like we can all have fun burning in church." Andrew muttered, effectively getting a laugh out of Sapnap. Andrew left the room soon after, while Sapnap sifted through the clothes he packed.

"Why do you think he said that?" Karl asked from his seat on the bed, watching Sapnap hold up random articles of clothing before tossing them to the side.

"Oh, don't mind him. He's joking about how, like, since I'm *gay* I'm gonna burst into flames if I walk into a church." Sapnap laughed again.

"I don't think so." Karl said after a second, making his way to his own suitcase. He picked out a pair of black and gray plaid pants and a white button down shirt, tossing the clothes onto the bed.

"Okay, he doesn't *actually* think I'm going to-"

"That's not what I mean. He said *we* can burn in church- he grouped himself in with us. I didn't know he was, well, I don't want to assume gay, but-"

Sapnap zoned out, his mind wandering back to the conversation he overheard between his brothers the previous night.

Andrew had been instantly accepting and supportive of him since he came out. Sapnap was a *bit* shocked by not only his understanding, but also how quickly he started pushing Sapnap to act on his feelings for Karl.

He assumed that maybe Andrew just defied all the odds of how a teenage boy born and raised in Texas would react to his older brother coming out. Now, Sapnap was considering the possibility that maybe Andrew was so accepting because he wasn't straight either.

"Hey, where did you go?" Karl asked quietly, sliding his hand across Sapnap's back as he stepped in front of him.

"Yeah, you look nice." Sapnap said blankly, finally zoning back into reality.

"*Thanks*, but that's not what I asked. You've been staring at the wall for like three minutes. What's on your mind?" Karl asked with a small smile, trailing a hand through Sapnap's hair. He leaned down, sifting through Sapnap's suitcase until he quickly pieced together an outfit for him to wear.

"I overheard Ben and Andrew talking about something last night that didn't make any sense at the time... Now, I'm not sure if it makes *perfect* sense or if it somehow makes even less sense." Sapnap shrugged, accepting the clothes Karl was holding out for him.

"You can ask him about it *after* you get dressed." Karl continued, pointing at the clothes draped over Sapnap's arm. "I'll meet you downstairs." Karl finished, heading for the door.

"Karl-" Sapnap started, reaching out for Karl. "Sorry, nevermind." He continued, quickly dropping Karl's hand.

"You sure?" Karl asked, tilting his head a bit to the side.

"Yeah, I'll, uh, I'll meet you downstairs in a minute." Sapnap said with a smile, turning to set his clothes on the bed.

"Okay." Karl said quietly, making it to the door before pausing. Sapnap was in the middle of getting dressed when he realized Karl was still in the room.

"What's up?" Sapnap asked, stepping into a pair of black jeans he didn't even realize he had packed.

"So, Andrew knows about... us." Karl confirmed quietly. "What about everyone else?" He continued. Sapnap looked up to see Karl looking aimlessly around the room.

"Just Andrew. I mean, I think Jen suspects *something*, but she hasn't outright said anything. My dad is, well, my dad. As for Ben and Marisol, I guess telling them would depend on how telling my dad and Jen would go." Sapnap shrugged.

As much as he knew this day would eventually come, the day he came out to his family, he had never really given much thought to how it would *actually* go.

"Got it." Karl answered, turning to face the door before deciding against leaving, instead facing Sapnap again. Sapnap was about halfway done buttoning up a shirt that Karl had definitely given him from his own suitcase and not Sapnap's.

Karl stepped forward, taking over on doing up the buttons. Sapnap sighed, bringing his hands to his sides, thankful for the assistance. He hated buttons. Why have buttons when you can have a zipper? Or better yet, just a pullover.

"Does that mean I can't.. uh, we shouldn't.." Karl stopped, sighing. "I just want to know what is and isn't okay in front of them." Karl finished, buttoning the final button. He ran his hands over Sapnap's shoulder, smoothing out the shirt.

"Until I tell them- *if* I even tell them while we're here, I guess just continue doing what we've been doing. I'm sorry if that's not the answer you were hoping for." Sapnap spoke slowly, the words hard to say.

The last thing he ever wanted was for Karl to think he was ashamed of him or he wanted to hide him. But at the end of the day, that's exactly how the situation must've looked.

"No, no. I understand. It's just *weird*, I guess. Like, before yesterday, holding hands, hugging, just being like this with you- it was our normal. But like, now we're *together* and all that is off the table. It's like we're dating in reverse." Karl said with a laugh, beginning to twirl a few of Sapnap's curls.

"Together? Dating? Not words I was expecting to hear from you so soon." Sapnap said with a laugh, pulling Karl in closer by his waist. Karl instantly looked down to him with wide eyes, quickly looking away.

"Aren't we- wait. Are you saying you're *not* my boyfriend?" Karl asked, clearly shocked. He was pushing his hands against Sapnap's shoulder, attempting to get away. Sapnap laughed, holding Karl tighter.

"*Karl Thomas Jacobs*, are you asking me out?" Sapnap teased. He was smiling so wide that his cheeks were beginning to ache.

"Okay, you're a moron. Forget I said any-"

"I want to be your boyfriend. I've *wanted* to be your boyfriend for a long time. I just didn't think you'd be comfortable with a title this soon, so I didn't want to push the subject." Sapnap explained, finally relaxing a bit when Karl stopped fighting the embrace.

Karl turned back to face Sapnap, his face beat red. Sapnap bit his tongue to avoid commenting on the very noticeable blush that was spread across his cheeks.

"*Well*, if that's settled, I think we have a church to go burn in or something." Karl grumbled, making Sapnap laugh. "Sap, come on, really. We need to-"

"Kiss me." Sapnap interrupted, his smile not once leaving his face. "That's what I wanted to ask for before you went downstairs." He finished, loosening his grip on Karl. The blush on Karl's cheeks was just as prominent as before, making his eye roll seem much less annoyed.

Sapnap leaned forward, bringing their lips together gently. Karl wrapped his arms around Sapnap's shoulders just as Sapnap pulled away, pecking Karl's lips once more before stepping back completely.

"Come on, we should've left five minutes ago. Jen's gonna kill us." Sapnap said with a smile, pulling on Karl's hand towards his bedroom door.

Chapter End Notes

... Karl realized he was fruity 5 minutes ago and his gaydar is already better than Sapnap's

Also, sorry if them being together is a bit rushed (I saw after 39 chapters). This book really was meant to just be fluff so I'm trying to get us there sooner lol

Let's go further back

Chapter Summary

Karl and Sapnap run into an old friend after church

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Say the word and I'll b-line us to a diner for breakfast instead." Sapnap said with a smile, looking over to Karl in the passenger seat. He was thankful the morning rain had already cleared, promising a cool and cloudy day.

"As of now, your family *likes* me. If I want them to continue liking me, you can't pull me into your schemes." Karl rolled his eyes with a smile. He tried to hit Sapnap's leg, but Sapnap caught his hand, intertwining their fingers instead.

"You're no fun. My boyfriend is a rule follower." Sapnap tried to tease, his smile polluting his tone.

"Oh my god, you've said *boyfriend* so many times, it doesn't even sound like a word anymore." Karl scoffed, attempting to shake Sapnap's hand off. Sapnap held on tighter, letting out a laugh.

"Well you're stuck with me now, Mr. '*We're reincarnated soulmates*'!" Sapnap mocked with a laugh, finally letting Karl's hand slide out of his own. The church was already coming into view, the parking lot completely full- *everyone* in his town all went to the same church.

"I hate you." Karl grumbled, sinking lower into his seat. He had his arms crossed over his chest, pouting like a child.

Sapnap continued to laugh under his breath from Karl's reaction, turning into the parking lot. The rest of his family had left a couple minutes before he and Karl did, so Sapnap wasn't surprised to see them all standing in the parking lot waiting.

"Ready?" Sapnap asked, putting the car in park. Karl reached over, seeming to be done pouting, and held Sapnap's hand.

"I haven't been to church in years." Karl answered, looking a bit nervous. Sapnap squeezed his hand, resting his head against the back of his seat.

"We're gonna go in there, say hi to a hundred people who I probably haven't even seen since I was a *toddler*, then sit and thumb war each other throughout the entire service." Sapnap said with a smile, turning over their hands.

"My first time going to church in years and you expect me to walk in there with the *man* I'm dating and then goof off in the pew the whole time? You *want* me to burn, don't you?" Karl laughed, swatting away Sapnap's hand when he tried to start a thumb war.

"I do love fire." Sapnap teased, resulting in Karl attempting to hide his laugh with a scoff, opening his car door.

"Give me a kiss." Sapnap interjected, grabbing Karl's arm. He was fully expecting Karl to continue protesting but to his pleasant surprise, Karl leaned over and pecked his lips.

Sapnap held onto Karl's shirt, preventing him from pulling away.

"A *real*-"

"You guys are *so* bad at being discreet." Andrew said while tapping on Sapnap's window. Sapnap instantly let go of Karl's shirt, turning to glare at Andrew. The rest of their family came up to the car as soon as Sapnap opened his door.

Karl met Sapnap on his side of the car, standing by his side. Jen was trying to usher everyone inside, reaching over and adjusting all of their hair and clothes just before they entered.

Sapnap rested his hand on Karl's lower back as he walked up the front steps. Karl looked over his shoulder with a small smile before facing front again.

Church went pretty much exactly like Sapnap said it was going to go. Somewhat familiar faces hugged him like he was family, everyone asking the same questions over and over.

Even when facing crowds of near strangers asking him increasingly invasive questions, Sapnap kept a smile on his face and his head held high. Getting the chance to see Karl sitting at the pew with Ben and Marisol, all three playing with Pokémon cards Marisol snuck in, was enough to get him through the awkward questions.

After the greetings, Sapnap reclaimed his seat next to Karl in their pew. Church was just as, well, *churchy* as he remembered- a lot of sitting, a lot of standing, a lot of people praying in unison.

Sapnap reached to the side, tapping Karl's leg. Karl tried to ignore him at first but soon gave Sapnap the attention he was clearly looking for.

"Let's actually go to breakfast after this." Sapnap whispered, a smile on his face as Karl squinted at him.

"Like with your family?" Karl whispered back, looking past Sapnap at the rest of his family lining the pew.

"Like on a *date*." Sapnap whispered even more quietly. Despite his softening tone, his smile had only continued to grow.

Karl's eyes widened, looking around the room like really was expecting them to catch on fire in the middle of mass.

"Is that a yes?" Sapnap whispered, rubbing his hand against the back of Karl's. Their hands were safely hidden at their sides, their legs blocking any view.

"Yes." Karl whispered back. Even with Karl facing his lap, Sapnap could see the smile growing on his face. Sapnap intertwined their fingers, squeezing Karl's hand before going back to pretending he was listening to the sermon.

"We'll meet you at home later." Sapnap called out just before splitting ways in the parking lot with his family. Andrew instantly ran over to them, despite his dad and Jen calling him back over.

"Tsssss." Andrew said dramatically, poking Sapnap with one finger before quickly pulling it away, pretending Sapnap burned him.

"You're a little shit, you know that?" Sapnap couldn't help but laugh, pushing Andrew away by his shoulders. Andrew stumbled back a bit, laughing as well, before jogging back over to the rest of their family.

"Should've done it back to him, see how he reacted." Karl shrugged, standing by his door and watching the rest of Sapnap's family shuffle into Jen's SUV.

"Nah. If and when he wants me to know, he'll come to me." Sapnap smiled, stepping around the car to open Karl's door for him.

"You're a *moron*." Karl rolled his eyes, accepting the gesture nonetheless.

"That's a funny way to pronounce *gentleman*." Sapnap teased, shutting the door once Karl was seated.

"I guess it's pretty easy to catch a city boy when you become one yourself."

Sapnap looked down through the car window, thankful to see Karl was already preoccupied with checking his phone.

"Charlie Johnson." Sapnap sighed, turning around to see Charlie, the same cowboy from the rodeo, leaning against the lifted truck parked next to them, clearly eyeing Sapnap's luxury car.

"Nick Armstrong. You know, I wasn't expecting to see you two here today." Charlie smiled, leaning to the side as an obvious attempt to look at Karl through the window.

"And I was really hoping I *wasn't* going to run into you here." Sapnap said flatly, stepping to the side to block Charlie's view.

"Well, we can't always get what we want, now can we?" Charlie stood back up straight, resuming his position of leaning against his car.

"Was there something you wanted or were you just going to stand there and gawk at my boyfriend all day?" Sapnap asked, crossing his arms over his chest.

"*Boyfriend*, huh?" Charlie raised an eyebrow, his smile growing. "Went from him taking your hat off as soon as I walked away to *boyfriend* in a day?" Charlie asked in a condescending tone.

"Fu-"

"Love? Can we get on the road?" Karl asked, rolling down the window, purposefully only looking at Sapnap. He had reached his hand out the window, gently holding onto Sapnap's arm.

"Nice to see you again, Karl." Charlie inserted himself, leaning to the side now that Sapnap was distracted. Karl looked Charlie over before finally meeting his gaze.

"Do I know you?" Karl asked innocently, tilting his head to the side. Sapnap turned around just in time to see Charlie's cocky smile fall completely flat.

"On that note, have a *blessed* day, Charlie." Sapnap said, doing his best to hide his smile from witnessing Karl completely shatter Charlie's ego.

Sapnap walked around the car quickly, sliding into the driver's seat. He didn't even make it out of the parking lot before he started laughing hysterically, Karl joining in immediately after.

Karl reached over and held Sapnap's hand in his own, bringing their hands to rest in his lap. Sapnap

pulled the car over as soon as the church was out of view, veering off to the side of the road.

"I *can't* believe you just did that!" Sapnap started laughing again. "And- and, his *face*! I swear I've never seen Charlie *fucking* Johnson look so mortified before." Sapnap continued to laugh, looking over to Karl.

Karl was smiling brightly, his eyes catching the small amount of sunlight peeking through the clouds. It was the same smile that was Sapnap's favorite. That was when it finally dawned on him.

The smile he loved the most on Karl was caused by his laughter. *He* was why Karl smiled like that.

Chapter End Notes

you thought just because we left the rodeo that yeehaw arc was over? jk it is over but i had to throw in one last possessive cowboy yeehaw *actually* boyfriend sapnap moment

Soft and warm and simple

Chapter Summary

Sapnap takes Karl to meet someone important to him

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Waffles are better- that's just a fact!"

"You're *so* wrong! Pancakes all the way."

Sapnap and Karl were bickering, walking hand in hand through the parking lot of the small diner Sapnap had driven them over 45 minutes to get to.

"Waffles have all the nooks and crannies for-"

"*Nooks and crannies-*"

"Shut up, I have a point! They hold butter and syrup better. And- *and* they're crispy so they don't get all soggy!" Sapnap argued, pulling apart their hands to open the door for Karl.

"You're-"

"Someone pinch me, I must be dreaming. *Nicky?*" A woman's voice called out from behind the counter.

"How about a hug instead of a pinch?" Sapnap said with a smile, walking up to the breakfast bar with his arms outstretched.

She set down her notepad and immediately made her way to Sapnap, pulling him in for a very tight hug. She was just passed middle aged, had gray hair that was braided into a low bun, a dark complexion, and was rather plump. She was the epitome of 'southern grandmother'.

"Oh baby, where did you go?" She said, finally breaking away from the hug to get a better look at Sapnap, reaching out to adjust his clothes.

"Florida, I told you that before I left." Sapnap smiled, letting her pick and poke at his appearance.

"That's not what I mean- where did *you* go? You're skin and bones baby, you need a good meal. What are they feeding you in Flor- *Oh!* Who do you have here? Is this your dream guy you were telling me about?" She stopped herself mid sentence once her eyes landed on Karl.

Karl brought his hand up to cover his laugh, all too aware that the few people eating in the restaurant were watching this entire situation unfold.

"No, no. I told you about a guy *named* Dream, who I live with in Florida. This is Karl, he's my best friend." Sapnap turned, waving Karl to come join them. Despite his timid approach, the woman pulled Karl to her chest just as lovingly as she did Sapnap.

"Hi baby, just call me Aunt Mae." She said with a smile, pulling back to also tidy Karl's appearance.

"Hi... Aunt Mae." Karl said with a small laugh, looking at Sapnap.

"Well, don't just stand there. Sit- sit!" She said, ushering them to a booth directly across from the kitchen. "Two orders of the usual?" She asked with a smile, not even bothering to grab her notepad.

"Well, *I'll* take the usual, but Karl is a moron who prefers *pancakes*." Sapnap shrugged, a smile creeping onto his lips as Aunt Mae began listing all the same reasons that Sapnap had earlier about why waffles were better.

"None of the fixings for him, just a stack of pancakes and an orange juice. Thanks, Aunt Mae." Sapnap said once she was done trying to persuade Karl.

"Of course, Nicky." She reached out, pushing a few hairs out of Sapnap's face. "You need a haircut baby, I can hardly see that handsome face." She said before heading back behind the counter, calling out their order to the kitchen.

"*Nicky*?" Karl tried to hide his smile, failing miserably.

"Hey- she's the *only* one who's allowed to call me that. Don't get any ideas." Sapnap warned, his face still carrying the smile it had since they walked in. "Plus, 'Nicky' is nothing- I still can't believe you called me *love* earlier." Sapnap did his best to laugh, in hopes it would hide the blush creeping onto his cheeks just thinking about hearing Karl call him that.

"Well, I wouldn't get used to it if I were you. Where are we anyway? We drove in the opposite direction from Houston. We're, like, even *more* in the middle of nowhere." Karl asked, playing with a few of the sugar packets on the table. Sapnap wasn't sure, but it looked like Karl was also hiding a bit of a blush.

"I used to come out here all the time. Aunt Mae's more like family to me than most of my relatives you met." Sapnap answered. His smile had begun to fade, but his lips were still curled up. The smile that remained almost looked sad.

"How did you find this place?" Karl asked. Sapnap was staring at Karl's hands across the table, watching him anxiously fiddle with whatever he could find.

"It's not really a fun story, but it has a good ending. I tried running away when I was 17. I had finally gotten my license and things at home were just, *different*. Jen and Mari had moved in a few months prior. Mari was only 2 or something, so seeing my dad be more of a *dad* to this stranger than he was to... you get the point. I packed a little bag in the middle of the night, I got in my truck, and I just drove. I got about 4 hours away before I turned back. I couldn't leave Ben and Andy like that. I couldn't leave them the same way our mom left us." Sapnap paused, reaching over to brush his hand over Karl's, preventing him from continuing to destroy all the sugar packets.

Karl turned his hand over, offering it for Sapnap to hold. Sapnap didn't even look around at the eyes he was sure were still on them. Instead, he traced his finger across Karl's palm.

"It was about 5am by the time I made it to this town and I was *beat*. I filled up my tank across the street and got a whiff of sweet greasy breakfast from the parking lot." Sapnap let out a small laugh in unison with Karl.

"Aunt Mae was working and without saying a word, she just *knew* I had a shit night. She brought me a full breakfast platter on the house and I sat here for an hour, crying, and eating waffles."

Sapnap laughed a bit more. Although it was far from funny at the time, it was a pretty hilarious story in hindsight.

"So, you kept coming back?" Karl asked, resting his head in one hand, keeping the other held out for Sapnap.

"Of course. The waffles here are to die for." Sapnap answered sarcastically, playfully rolling his eyes. "Aunt Mae was also the only person in Texas that I felt like I really connected with. She's kind of like a mom to me." Sapnap said more genuinely with a smile, keeping his face towards the table.

"Does she, uh, *know*?" Karl asked quietly, looking around the primarily vacant dining room.

"No, or at least I never *told* her. I'm starting to think she might have a pretty good idea though." Sapnap smiled a bit, looking up. He and Karl looked over to the counter in unison, seeing Aunt Mae with a big smile on her face, looking at their hands over the table. As soon as she saw them looking at her, she gestured that her 'lips were sealed' before leaving to check on another table.

"I think our cover might be blown." Karl whispered, holding onto Sapnap's hand, stopping him from tracing his palm. Sapnap took a slightly shaky breath, finally wrapping his fingers around Karl's hand.

"I think you might be right." Sapnap answered in a whisper, as Aunt Mae approached with two glasses of orange juice.

"It'll be just a minute on the food." She said with a warm smile, setting down the glasses.

"Thank you." Sapnap and Karl said in unison, pulling apart their hands to each take a sip of their juice.

"I hope you're treating my Nicky right." Aunt Mae said quietly to Karl. Karl nearly spit out his juice as Sapnap began laughing.

"I, uh, of course." Karl answered after a second, still coughing a bit.

"Aunt Mae, don't scare away the first boy I've brought to you." Sapnap said quietly, handing Karl a few napkins.

"I'm just glad you stopped bringing *girls*. I don't know who you thought you were fooling with that." She shrugged, smiling as Sapnap was now the one almost choking on his drink.

Aunt Mae reached over, putting her hand under Karl's chin to turn his face towards hers. Karl was still smiling from watching Sapnap be the embarrassed one.

"You know, he actually kind of looks like that spunky little brunette thing you brought here once when you were in college. Crystal or Ca-"

"Cristine?" Karl asked with a shocked smile, turning to face Sapnap.

Sapnap looked absolutely mortified, slumping down in his seat and putting his face in his hands. What were the chances that Aunt Mae and his dad would compare Karl to the *exact* same ex-girlfriend.

"That's her name. But don't worry baby, you're prettier." She said with a smile, pinching one of Karl's cheeks before heading back to the kitchen.

"*Someone* has a type." Karl teased, taking a sip of his juice.

"*Someone's* a moron." Sapnap scoffed, his glowing cheeks acting as a dead give away of how he was really feeling.

Chapter End Notes

found family > family

"Planets" and "stars"

Chapter Summary

Sapnap takes Karl to another place that was important to him

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Don't wait a whole year to see me again, got it?" Aunt Mae said with a smile, grabbing the last empty plate off their table.

"I'll do my best." Sapnap said, leaning to the side to grab his wallet.

"You know I'm not accepting your money." Aunt Mae interjected, making Sapnap freeze.

"I'm not the same broke teenager I was ba-"

"You could have one dollar or one *hundred* dollars and it wouldn't matter. *Family* doesn't pay." She said again, leaning over and kissing the top of Sapnap's head before bringing the dishes back to the kitchen.

As soon as she was out of sight, Sapnap pulled out a few hundred dollars from his wallet, partially hiding them underneath his orange juice cup.

"Think of it as... me paying my tab. Let's go before she asks who I robbed." Sapnap whispered with a smile, already standing from the booth.

"She's going to chase us down in the parking lot." Karl whispered back, following closely behind him.

"My car goes zero to sixty in like, three seconds- I'd like to see her try." Sapnap scoffed over his shoulder, reaching back and grabbing Karl's hand now that the few people eating breakfast had all left.

"It was nice to meet you!" Karl called out, waving his free hand over his head to Aunt Mae.

"You too, baby. You kids have fun- but not *too* much fun!" She waved back, heading over to their table. Sapnap looked back at Karl before dragging him to the door as fast as he could.

As soon as Karl started laughing, Sapnap kept his head turned towards Karl, watching his smile grow and his hair bounce as they ran.

"Go, go, go, go, *go*!" Karl cheered as soon as they both jumped into the car, drumming his hands against the dash. Sapnap got one more glimpse of Karl's glowing smile before throwing the car into drive and skidding out of the parking lot.

"So, where are we off to now?" Karl asked, gazing out the window. Sapnap wasn't sure what he found so interesting out there, just fields that stretch on for miles with nothing in sight.

"We can head back to my parents house if you-"

"No. Or, at least not yet. I want to see more places like *this*. I want to meet more people like Aunt Mae." Karl finally turned back to Sapnap, giving him a smile and leaning his head against his seat.

"Seriously?" Sapnap asked, looking between Karl and the road.

"Of course." Karl said quietly, reaching over and tucking a hair behind Sapnap's ear. "I'm enjoying the *Sapnap lore*." He laughed.

"Moron." Sapnap shook his head, grabbing Karl's hand from his hair and kissing the back of it.

"Still going to remember every single day I kiss you?" Sapnap asked sarcastically.

"My memory isn't *infinite*." Karl answered with a laugh. He turned his hand in Sapnap's, interlocking their fingers. "What if from now on, I just remember today. April 16th."

"I like that." Sapnap agreed, squeezing Karl's hand.

April 16th.

Their anniversary.

"I know somewhere I can take you, if you're sure you're up for it." Sapnap said with a smile, tilting his head to the side to get a better look at Karl. Karl looked back apprehensively, letting out a small laugh.

"It's not another rodeo, is it?" He asked, leaning back in his seat.

"No, it's not another rodeo." Sapnap laughed, pulling over to turn around the car. "I want to take you to one of my favorite places." He smiled more genuinely, loving the way Karl slowly rubbed his thumb against his fingers.

Sapnap headed back towards his hometown, staying on the main road instead of turning off towards his house. Karl had fallen asleep halfway through the drive, his hand still clutching onto Sapnap's.

"μωπό μου. We're here." Sapnap said quietly, leaning over to kiss the top of Karl's head. It almost felt foreign that he didn't have to hold back, remembering that he could kiss Karl as much as he wanted to now.

"Where are we?" Karl mumbled, sitting up in his seat and looking around.

"My high school football field." Sapnap smiled, pushing a few stray hairs away from Karl's face.

"I thought you were going to take me to a field of flowers or a hidden little lake, but I guess this works too." Karl laughed, stretching in his seat.

"Hey, you asked me to take you to places that meant something to me. *This* is where I was my happiest most of the time." Sapnap said with a smile, unbuckling Karl and himself.

Sapnap got up and walked around the car, while Karl slowly came back to life. He opened the door for him, his heart warming at the sight of Karl's sleepy smile.

"Come on, μωπό μου." Sapnap held out his hand, which Karl slowly accepted.

"What does that mean again? Little baby or something?" Karl asked with a laugh and yawn at the

same time.

"It means *my* baby, not *little* baby." Sapnap explained, pulling Karl out of the car. "What?" Sapnap asked when he could tell Karl was trying to hold back a laugh.

"It's just, you literally were *so* adamant about not being possessive, yet the first thing you call me is *your* baby." Karl finally let out his laugh, leaning against the side of the car. Sapnap shook his head, closing Karl's door for him.

"That's just how you say it in Greek. If you only say 'baby' it means you're talking about an *actual* baby or something." Sapnap rolled his eyes, pulling Karl away from the car.

"Wait. Say it again." Karl asked, pausing a step behind Sapnap.

"μωρό μου?" Sapnap asked with a laugh.

"*More-oh moo.*" Karl said slowly, attempting to repeat the phrase.

"Close enough." Sapnap shrugged, reaching back out to Karl.

"Wait, yeah, more-oh moo! I swear you've said that around me before- like before we got here." Karl said, looking off like he was trying to remember something. Sapnap froze, turning around quickly. Before he could step away, Karl pulled on his hand.

"You always say that after you tell me goodnight when you visit." Karl said. "I'm right, aren't I?" Karl asked when Sapnap stayed facing away. He turned around to face Karl slowly, letting out a nervous laugh.

"I mean-" Sapnap started, pulling Karl towards the field. "Thought it was established last night that I've liked you for a *while*."

"Sap! What else have you called me when you were speaking in Greek?" Karl laughed, catching up so he was standing by Sapnap's side. Because of the rain that morning, the air was much chillier today than it had been any other day since they arrived.

"Uhh." Sapnap started with a small laugh, wrapping an arm around Karl's waist. "καρδιά μου, ήλιε μου , λουλούδι μου- (Greek to English translation: my heart, my sun, my flower)"

"That one! Lue lue moo!" Karl exclaimed, pointing at Sapnap. Sapnap started laughing at Karl's poor pronunciation. "What does that one mean?" Karl asked, slapping Sapnap's arm for laughing at him.

"It means 'my flower'." Sapnap shrugged, a smile still on his face. Sapnap began laughing when Karl looked at him with wide eyes and his mouth open, halting his pace. "What's your-"

"You *liar*! You told me that meant 'bless you'!" Karl exclaimed, a laugh escaping him.

"Whoops." Sapnap laughed as well, sprinting away from Karl as soon as he started chasing after him. "Good luck! I've got the home field advantage!" Sapnap called out over his shoulder, as the distance between him and Karl grew.

"Unfair!" Karl called out, already slowing down his pace and beginning to pant. Sapnap looped around, jogging back towards Karl.

Sapnap gently tackled Karl to the ground, falling first to soften Karl's landing. He slid Karl off his

chest, so they were both lying in the lightly dampened grass, watching as the clouds slowly drifted by in the breeze, catching their breath.

"So, where are we going next?" Karl asked, reaching over a hand to Sapnap.

"I don't have anywhere else to take you that holds any true significance." Sapnap let out a dry laugh. He looked in Karl's direction, surprised to see such a sad expression on his face.

"What do you mean?" Karl asked, rolling on his side so he could watch Sapnap track the clouds with his eyes.

"Aunt Mae's diner, this field- these are the only places where I really felt the most like myself when I lived here." Sapnap shrugged.

"No." Karl sat up, pulling his hand out of Sapnap's so he could stand.

"What do you mean, *no*?" Sapnap laughed, holding up a hand to block the sun peeking through the clouds.

"I mean *no*." Karl smiled, holding out his hand to help Sapnap up. "I don't want you to leave Texas just having a place that *demonizes* pancakes and a muddy football field being the only places you like. Let's go make some memories." Karl continued, grabbing onto Sapnap's hand tightly.

"Σε αγαπώ (Greek to English translation: I love you)." Sapnap said softly as soon as he and Karl were standing face to face again.

"What does that mean?" Karl asked, sliding his hands up Sapnap's chest until they were on his shoulders. Sapnap wrapped his arms around Karl's waist, pulling him closer.

"Bless you." Sapnap smiled, leaning up to peck Karl's lips before he could argue. Karl leaned into the kiss with a small laugh, pulling away after a moment.

"I have a sneaking feeling that you actually just called me a moron." Karl laughed, stepping away and tugging on Sapnap's hand.

"Something like that." Sapnap smiled, following closely behind.

Chapter End Notes

karl is starting to see just how much sapnap missed out on during his childhood/teenage years, so he wants to rewrite some of those memories :)

also, to anyone who actually speaks greek, pls don't roast me alive. everything that i've referenced is what reddit said greek terms of endearment are

(I call this arc: karlnapcore/healing sapnap's inner child)

Decode meaning into feelings

Chapter Summary

Sapnap and Karl run into someone from Sapnap's past after exploring his high school

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"So, how does this even work? Where do you want to go?" Sapnap asked.

They were walking with interlocked fingers, bumping into each other with each step across the field. The air was cooler and the sun peeked out from behind the clouds less often.

"Why don't we start here?" Karl answered, a soft smile on his face. He used the hand that wasn't holding Sapnap's to point to the school on the other side of the field.

"What are we supposed to do in my old high school?" Sapnap couldn't help but laugh. High school wasn't necessarily hell for him- he played sports, he had girlfriends, he made a decent group of friends. That being said, none of it was really authentic- really him.

"What are things you wished happened in high school that you never got the chance to do?" Karl shrugged, tugging on Sapnap's hand towards the school. "Come on, it's Sunday. Who's going to be in there?" Karl said with a small but growing smile.

"Cleaning people could be in there." Sapnap interjected a bit nervously, squeezing Karl's hand as they walked up the back steps of the school. "Things I wished happened? I don't know. I wish I could've dated guys without getting the shit beat out of me. Wish I could've walked through the halls holding hands with a guy who I liked without being afraid." Sapnap answered. Despite his saddening tone, he kept a smile on his face.

"I guess you'll just have to settle for me then." Karl beamed, walking right up to the entrance and swinging the door open. Karl let go of Sapnap's hand, running down the empty hallway.

"Karl!" Sapnap said in a rough whisper, jogging after Karl when he started sprinting away from him. Sapnap caught up quickly, holding a hand to Karl's mouth when his laughter echoed through the corridors.

"Come on." Karl said more quietly, pulling Sapnap's hand away from his mouth. "It's time to walk through the halls, holding hands with the guy you like." Karl teased, intertwining his and Sapnap's fingers once again.

As much as Sapnap wanted to push Karl away and laugh at such a ridiculous proposal, it honestly felt a bit surreal that he was back in his old high school, walking through the halls with his boyfriend.

"This was my locker senior year." Sapnap paused, pointing to one of the lockers that lined the walls. "Locker 89. It was the same as my football number." Sapnap smiled.

"That's a lucky coincidence." Karl laughed, stepping forward and running his hands across the

faded 89 written in bronze.

"Oh, not a coincidence. Seniors get to pick their lockers." Sapnap said with a laugh, like that was an obvious conclusion. "I graduated with like, 70 people. Considering how many hundreds of lockers are in this building, it was just one of those senior perks to pick your own." Sapnap finished, reaching out and pulling Karl by his hand again.

"Kiss me." Karl requested, not letting Sapnap pull him away from the locker.

"What?" Sapnap asked with a laugh, taking a step towards Karl.

"Kiss me like the bell just rang and you're about to walk me to class." Karl explained with a smile growing on his face, his eyes scanning over Sapnap's reddening cheeks.

"You're getting way too into this." Sapnap laughed, stepping forward and kissing Karl regardless.

"Maybe. Can you blame me? I never get to see you smile like this." Karl justified, swinging his and Sapnap's arms as they made their way down the hallway again.

Sapnap showed Karl around the school. He took him to where he had his favorite classes, his least favorite classes, and the best hiding spots in the building.

Karl made sure to kiss him in every room they stopped at, never failing to take a moment to appreciate Sapnap's smile each time. Sapnap had circled them back to the exit by the football field, opening the door for Karl.

"And that leads us back to here, the good old footb-"

"Armstrong! What the hell are you doing here?" An older man yelled from across the field. Karl and Sapnap froze, looking across the field to see a tall man with salt and pepper hair, as well as a small crowd of teenage boys behind him- including Sapnap's brother Andrew.

"Coach Brown! Did you really drag the team out here on a Sunday?" Sapnap yelled back with pained laughter, stepping away from Karl. As Sapnap walked down the steps and back onto the field, Karl stayed back by the door.

"It's preseason, you know that. Need to get these girls into shape before the Baytown team beats the crap out of them." He said with a laugh, slapping Sapnap's back a few times when he approached. "Look at you. You used to be built like a real football player. Now you're as thin as your brother."

Sapnap cringed, doing his best to keep a smile on his face for the sake of appearances. He loved football, yes, but he hated his coach. Sapnap swore half of the homophobic shit the students said were things they heard from him first.

"I'm definitely still stronger than him, but Andy's taller than me these days. I'm sure that helps with his sprints." Sapnap said with a smile, a groan erupting from every boy on the field.

"You heard him! Sprints!" Coach Brown yelled, causing the team to start running from one end of the field to the other.

"Oh man, I don't miss that." Sapnap laughed a bit, trying to step away from the coach.

"Why don't you join them, you can- oh. Who'd ya bring with you? Got yourself a boyfriend or something?" Coach Brown laughed, whistling to catch Karl's attention, waving him onto the field.

Sapnap did his best to laugh through his discomfort.

Karl looked a bit nervous, walking down the steps with one arm crossed over his chest. Sapnap was cursing to himself internally, wishing he had taken them out a different exit.

"Hi." Karl said with a smile, holding out his hand. Coach Brown stared at his hand for a moment before taking it, shaking it roughly. Karl winced but quickly masked his pain with a laugh.

"Oh, delicate hands. Guessing you were a foot fairy then?" Coach Brown laughed, nudging Sapnap. Sapnap let out a sigh, looking at Karl with nothing but remorse in his eyes.

"Soccer. He's asking if you played soccer." Sapnap clarified with an apologetic smile to Karl.

"Oh, yeah. I did." Karl nodded, looking quickly between Sapnap and his coach. "I was a midfielder."

"You know, we've actually got to get going. But it was uh, great... to see you coach." Sapnap interrupted whatever other offensive thing his coach was going to respond, pulling himself away from Coach Brown's side.

"Come on, not even going to join them for one sprint? Let's see your midfielding girlfriend in action." He laughed, pointing between Karl and the field.

"Girlfriend?" Karl asked with narrowing brows, staring at the coach.

"Oh, come on kid. It's a joke." He shrugged, still laughing a bit to himself.

"Explain the joke to me." Karl said flatly.

"What?" Coach Brown asked, taken aback. Sapnap looked over to Karl, fighting back a smile.

"I said, explain the joke to me. You seem to think it's hilarious, so tell me what's so funny." Karl shrugged, maintaining direct eye contact with Coach Brown.

"Because- well. You're-... Nevermind, uh, didn't you say you had somewhere to be?" Coach Brown looked away, letting out a fake cough. Sapnap jumped on the opportunity, grabbing Karl's arm to pull him away.

"We do. Always a pleasure, coach." Sapnap said, not even caring that it was obvious he was smiling because of how Karl completely embarrassed him, as he said his goodbye.

"Maybe next time?" Karl called out over his shoulder with a shrug, following Sapnap to the car. As soon as they were seated, Sapnap drove out of the parking lot as quickly as he could, not slowing down until his high school was just a speck in the distance.

"I'm sorry. He was your coach and I was being so rude. I just didn't like the way he talked to you-talked about me. Still, I shouldn't have-"

Sapnap cut Karl off, screeching the car to a stop, pulling over onto the shoulder. As soon as he put the car in park, he turned to see Karl staring at him, a bit of fear in his eyes. Sapnap let out a quick laugh before leaning forward, pulling Karl in by his button up to kiss him.

Seconds seemed to move by more slowly as Karl leaned into the kiss, wrapping his arms around Sapnap's shoulders. Sapnap broke the kiss with a few pants, resting his forehead against Karl's.

"That was amazing. I've never seen him so stunned before! You said exactly what I wanted to say

to him- to get him to finally shut the hell up!" Sapnap laughed, pulling away with a growing smile.

Karl let out a relieved laugh, leaning back in to kiss Sapnap a bit more gently.

"You're not upset?" Karl asked after a second, pulling away.

"Not at all. That was amazing, Karl. You're amazing." Sapnap ran a hand through Karl's hair, leaning back into his own seat. After a few seconds of staring at each other in silence, they both burst out into laughter.

Chapter End Notes

Karlnapcore arc off to a nice fluffy start :)

The player was alive

Chapter Summary

Sapnap and Karl get back to his parents' house

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Where else should we go?" Karl asked, sliding his hand into Sapnap's while he continued to drive down another barren backroad.

"Honestly, there are probably a million places I could take you, but we need to get back home. My car is at 10%." Sapnap said with a small frown, squeezing Karl's hand.

"Oh." Karl answered after a second, starting to pull his hand away. Sapnap held on tighter, pulling Karl's hand to his lap.

"Whoa, what's with the sudden mood shift? What's wrong?" Sapnap asked. He was debating on pulling over, but he genuinely didn't know if his car's battery life would survive any detours.

"Nothing- it's just. I don't know, the same thing I said before we went to church I guess. Like, we can't hold hands there, I can't lay with you, I feel like I can't even be *near* you. It's such a foreign feeling to censor myself so much when I'm with you." Karl responded quietly, turning down the music.

Sapnap wished he could say that wasn't true- that he would *love* to have Karl feel comfortable enough to do those things around his house. But the truth of the matter was even Sapnap wasn't comfortable with being himself there. It was where his whole disdain for Texas originated- the house that never felt like a home.

"What if..." Sapnap started, letting out a shaky breath once he turned onto his road. "What if I told them? You know, about me being gay- about how we're together." He offered. His heart was racing and he was almost certain that Karl could notice the sweat accumulating on his palms.

"No, no don't do that. You should come out to them when you're ready- when it's because *you* want to. I don't want to guilt you into doing that for me." Karl responded immediately, looking over to Sapnap.

"Well, it wouldn't be just for you. It'd be for *us*, right?" Sapnap asked, looking between Karl and his upcoming turn into the driveway.

"Sap, really, take your time with telling them. I don't want you to rush into something you could regret. We're only here for a few more days, I'll get over it." Karl said again, sounding a bit nervous. He brought his hand away from Sapnap's when they pulled up to the house. Ben and Marisol were kicking around a soccer ball in the front yard, while Jen sat on the porch swing.

"Tell me we're okay." Sapnap put the car into park after pulling up to the far side of the house, successfully hiding them from his family's view, and turning to face Karl.

"More than okay." Karl assured him with a faint smile on his face. Sapnap could feel his insides churning from the way Karl's smile didn't seem to make it to his eyes.

"Say it like you mean it or tell me how to fix it." Sapnap said, unbuckling himself so he could fully face Karl. He already felt relieved when Karl let out a small but genuine laugh.

"We are *more* than okay." Karl said again, running a hand through Sapnap's hair. Sapnap leaned into his touch, resting his head against his seat.

"Σε αγαπώ (Greek to English translation: I love you)." Sapnap mumbled, closing his eyes as Karl continued to run a hand through his hair.

"Okay, now I'm convinced you're just making noises and pretending it's Greek." Karl laughed, leaning back in his seat. Sapnap laughed along for a second before he reached back out for Karl's hand, returning it to his head.

"One more minute. Please?" Sapnap pleaded, letting go of Karl's hand once Karl resumed running his fingers through his hair. Even with their conversation still weighing heavily on his mind, Sapnap was grateful to have quiet moments like this with Karl.

He just wished these moments didn't have to stay hidden behind closed doors.

"Mari is going to come running around the side of the house any minute to come see us." Karl warned, continuing to stroke his hand through Sapnap's hair. Sapnap was relieved to hear Karl's tone had returned to normal, no more underlying anxiety in his voice.

"Let her. I don't care." Sapnap sighed. For once, he actually meant it. He really couldn't care less if his family saw him right now. Could they truly be upset if they saw how happy Karl made him?

"You don't mean that." Karl said quietly, his hand slowing down until it rested gently on Sapnap's cheek.

"What if I do?" Sapnap asked, finally opening his eyes to look at Karl. He pulled Karl's hand away from his cheek, bringing it to his lips instead. There was a hint of a smile on Karl's lips, but all Sapnap wanted was for it to grow into something more genuine.

Sapnap tugged on Karl's hand, pulling him in closer. It made Sapnap's heart ache a bit when he saw Karl glance nervously out the window, checking to see if anyone was approaching. After the coast was deemed clear, Karl gently pressed his lips against Sapnap's.

This was light and slow, followed by Sapnap giving Karl several small kisses when he started to pull away. Sapnap was relieved to hear Karl's familiar high pitched laughter fill the car, even if it was just for a fleeting moment.

"Come on, time to get up. I'm sure you're dying to change out of those clothes anyway." Karl laughed, ruffling up Sapnap's hair before pulling away again. This time Karl was able to open his door and get out, Sapnap being too slow to catch him again.

Just like Karl predicted, Marisol came running around to the car, carrying the soccer ball in her hands.

"Kuya Karl! Will you play with me and Ben?" Marisol asked, running past Karl and opening Sapnap's car door. "You too, Kuya Nick!" Marisol insisted, doing her best to pull Sapnap out of his seat.

"Give us a minute and then we'll play with you and Ben." Sapnap smiled, getting out of the car. He nodded towards the front of the house to Karl, silently telling him to go wait inside while he got the car plugged in.

"We'll be back out, promise." Karl smiled at Marisol, trying not to laugh at her pouting.

Sapnap watched as Karl headed inside without another word, only waving to Jen briefly when he walked past her.

"If you frown for too long, your face is gonna get stuck like that." Sapnap teased, pinching Marisol's cheek when he walked by, grabbing the charging cord from his trunk.

"Where did you and Kuya Karl go? We've been waiting to play for *forever*." She emphasized, dropping the ball on the ground. She kicked the ball against the house back and forth with herself while Sapnap got everything set up.

"I took Karl out to breakfast and then I showed him a couple places that were important to me when I lived here." Sapnap said with a smile, doing his best to simplify their afternoon. Marisol slowly stopped kicking the ball, letting it roll past her when she turned around to face her older brother.

"That sounds like a *date*." She said matter-of-factly, like she had just learned what a date was and was proud to identify an example of it. Sapnap let out a laugh, peeking around the corner of the house. Ben was laying in the yard and Jen was still reading her book on the swing.

"Wanna know a secret?" Sapnap asked, finally plugging the car in and leaning down to Marisol's level. Her eyes lit up with excitement as she nodded her head, stepping closer.

"What is it? I *swear* I won't tell anyone!" Marisol whispered, also looking over her shoulder towards the front yard.

"I wanna know the secret too." Sapnap's dad said with a laugh, walking over from behind the car, startling both of them. Marisol was the first to laugh, running over to Sapnap's dad.

"It's not a secret if other people know!" Marisol said with her arms crossed, only able to keep up her pout for a second before she started laughing again when Sapnap's dad picked her up.

"Hey, dad." Sapnap spoke up, shutting his car door.

"So, what's the big secret then?" He asked again, setting down Marisol.

"Mari's right, it's not a secret if other people know." Sapnap shrugged, walking backwards for a few steps before turning around to head inside. For some reason, his heart wasn't racing like he expected it to.

If his dad hadn't interrupted when he did, he certainly would've heard Sapnap tell Marisol that the secret was his and Karl's trip *was* a date. For some reason, Sapnap actually wished his dad hadn't said anything.

He was to the point where he was debating on just telling them- ripping off the bandage. But then again, his subconscious and natural instinct to run in situations like that seemed to have taken over, his pace not slowing down even after he was halfway up the staircase.

sorry for the bit of angst, i've been listening to washing off the blood by powfu and romantic homicide by d4vd on repeat

You. You. You are alive

Chapter Summary

Karl opens up about his fears around coming out

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Hey, everything alright?" Karl asked when Sapnap walked into his room. Karl didn't change out of his church clothes, instead layering a dark green crewneck over top of his white button up.

"Yeah, yeah. I almost just told Mari that we were on a date." Sapnap said with a small laugh. Unlike Karl, he quickly stripped to just his boxers and t-shirt, searching for a pair of joggers.

"Why would you do that?" Karl asked, clearly sounding more distraught about the situation than Sapnap was.

"When I told her where we've been she said it sounded like a date. I was going to say she wasn't *wrong*, but then my dad walked up. It's weird- I didn't feel as panicked as I thought I was going to when I realized he nearly overheard. Honestly, maybe I am ready to just tell them." Sapnap said with a shrug, looking over to Karl. "Plus, you're here with me and-"

"I'm sorry, I definitely could've been more clear about this earlier. But, um, I don't *want* you to come out while we're still here. As much as it sucks and I'm sad that I can't be with you in the way we want when they're around, I don't think I'm mentally prepared for it." Karl interrupted, turning around, his arms held tightly over his chest.

"Karl, I-I didn't even realize that I'd be taking that decision away from you- I'm sorry. This is all still so new to you, I didn't even think about how that situation would force you to come out too." Sapnap rushed, walking forward to gently rest a hand on Karl's back. Karl was silent for a second before letting out a sigh, turning around to face Sapnap.

"No, no, that's not why I don't feel like I'm ready. I'm talking about how I've seen the way your dad looks at us whenever we show even the smallest amount of affection. I'm not sure if it's necessarily *fair* to make this assumption, but based on what I've noticed, I'm guessing coming out to him might not be the *best* experience." Karl continued, looking at Sapnap with sorrow in his eyes.

As much as neither of them wanted to address his dad's unexplained behavior, Karl had put it out in the open for them to talk about. He finally addressed the homophobic attitude his dad seemed to have.

Sapnap wasn't oblivious to his dad's stray glances and stares. The same stare he gave not only his son but also any stranger in public who dared to look or act in a way that defied a social norm. Sapnap would be kidding himself to think that coming out to his dad was going to be a positive experience.

"The reason I don't want you to come out isn't because *I'm* not ready to come out. It's because I'm

scared, Sap- I'm scared for *you*. Hearing about what he was like, what he put you and your brothers through- I can't watch him hurt you again. And I especially can't watch when it's because of me." Karl turned away, wiping his eyes before Sapnap could even see a tear fall.

"μωρό μου (Greek to English translation: my baby)." Sapnap mumbled, walking forward to pull Karl against his chest. "Don't cry for me, you're breaking my heart." Sapnap whispered, taking a step back so he was sitting on the edge of the bed, pulling Karl to his lap.

"I wish I was stronger. I wish I could stand up to him like I did with your coach. I just want you to feel *safe* when you're with me. That's all I want." Karl explained, pushing his tear soaked face into the side of Sapnap's neck.

"Do... Do *you* feel safe here?" Sapnap asked slowly. Normally he would pull away in an attempt to get Karl to look at him, but he just continued to pet Karl's hair slowly, letting him stay where he was comfortable- where he felt *safe*.

"When I'm with you I do." Karl answered after a minute. "I won't lie though, coming here was scary enough to begin with- and that was before I realized I'm not exactly everyone's 'cup of tea'." Karl admitted.

"Should we leave? My car will be fully charged by morning. Even if we just give it a couple hours, I'm sure it'll have enough battery to get us to Houston and there we can-"

"I don't want to run away." Karl interrupted, keeping his face tucked into the crook of Sapnap's neck.

"It doesn't have to be '*running away*'. It's keeping you safe- keeping *both* of us safe." Sapnap whispered, kissing the top of Karl's head.

"You want me to be the oldest son's surprise boyfriend *and* the reason he left halfway through his first visit in over a year? You're really painting a target on my back." Karl let out a light laugh, finally pulling away enough to look at Sapnap.

Even with tears clinging to his bottom lashes, rosy cheeks, and runny nose, Karl still mustered up a smile, as he reached up to rest a hand on Sapnap's face.

"We can stay- I *want* to stay." Karl said quietly, wiping away the rest of his tears with the sleeve of his sweater. "I really love your family and they've been so kind to me. I don't want my hypothetical fears to ruin such a nice trip." Karl finished, running his finger under Sapnap's watery eyes.

Sapnap could tell Karl was being genuine, that he really did want to stay despite all the things he said he feared. Even so, Sapnap was having a hard holding back from not listening to Karl. His number one priority was to make Karl feel safe again, even if it meant cutting their trip short.

"Swear to me that the *second* you don't want to be here anymore you'll tell me. You'll tell me and we can leave. I'm serious, I don't even care if it's in the middle of the night." Sapnap held Karl's face in his hands, looking into his eyes while he spoke.

"I swear." Karl said with a small smile, leaning forward to kiss Sapnap.

Sapnap knew that Karl was capable of making decisions for himself, but the way he could still feel Karl's bottom lip quiver while pressed against his own was chipping away at his heart.

He wasn't sure who to be more upset with- his dad for making Karl feel this way or himself for putting Karl in this position.

Sapnap pulled away first, running his thumb over Karl's bottom lip. Just as he was about to address the quiver that remained and the fear that hadn't left Karl's eyes, Karl spoke up.

"So... Are you ready to go play soccer and pretend like we weren't just crying and being gay?" Karl asked with an abrupt laugh, standing from Sapnap's lap. Sapnap reached out and held firmly onto Karl's hand, pulling him back towards him.

No matter how obvious it was that Karl was deflecting with humor to avoid talking about what was really going on, Sapnap decided to just go along with it. If Karl wasn't going to take him up on his offer of leaving, he would just have to wait for Karl to decide their next move.

"What if we *be gay* for five more minutes?" Sapnap smiled, wiggling his eyebrows a few times until Karl laughed, continuing to walk away from their seat on the bed.

"You're lucky you're cute." Karl scoffed over his shoulder, doing his best to assess his appearance in the bathroom mirror.

"You can't say that." Sapnap mumbled, a genuine smile growing on his face. He followed Karl into the bathroom, hugging him around his waist from behind. "Have I ever told you how much I like when you wear this color?" Sapnap asked, peeking over Karl's shoulder briefly before putting his face against Karl's back again.

"What? Dark green?" Karl asked, lowering his hands from his face to hold onto Sapnap's arms.

"Yeah. It makes your eyes look bluer. I like your eyes." Sapnap spoke quietly, resting his chin on Karl's shoulder so he could look at them standing together in the mirror.

"I'm not allowed to tell you that you're cute but you can say *that*?" Karl said with a playful eye roll, doing his best to lean to the side so he could look at Sapnap.

"What's so bad about what I said? I've told you lots of times that I think your eyes are pretty." Sapnap laughed, pulling himself away from Karl's back.

Karl turned around, leaning against the sink. He reached out and grabbed onto Sapnap's t-shirt gently, preventing him from walking away.

"Yeah... but this is the first time you've told me that since I realized the feeling I get when you say that is me wanting to kiss you." Karl admitted, resting his hands more gently on Sapnap's chest now that he was no longer trying to walk away.

"So... does this mean five more minutes of being gay?" Sapnap said with a smile, making Karl look away and laugh.

"Five more minutes." He reluctantly answered, sliding his hands from Sapnap's chest to his shoulders as he stepped closer until their lips met.

Chapter End Notes

little bit of hurt/comfort for the weekend

About to dream again

Chapter Summary

Sapnap and Karl decide to have a night in

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"I think that's, what, 15 points for us and negative 3 for you guys?" Karl said with a bright smile, high-fiving Marisol on his way to get the ball.

"I still don't think tackling you deserved *that* big of a penalty." Sapnap rolled his eyes, doing kick-ups with the ball instead of returning it to Karl.

"Attempts to cause bodily harm are a 5 point deduction- *each*." Jen called out from her place on the porch swing, her book still in her hand.

"Dumb rule, if you ask me." Ben grumbled, crossing his arms.

"Well, I *like* the-"

"Andrew's back!" Ben interrupted Marisol, running towards the driveway, as Andrew and their dad pulled up.

As soon as the car was in park, Andrew got out, dragging his bags behind him. He didn't even try to hide his glare at Sapnap and Karl as he walked past them, blatantly ignoring Ben. Andrew took one look at the steps up to the front porch before groaning, dropping his bags, and laying in the grass instead.

"Was coach Brown really that hard on you?" Sapnap asked, heading over to Andrew. He picked up Andrew's bags, throwing them onto the porch for whenever Andrew decided to get up.

"Fuck you." Andrew grumbled covering his face with his forearm to shield his eyes from the sun.

"Watch your mouth." Their dad warned, walking around them and heading up the front porch to join Jen on the swing.

"What's your deal?" Sapnap asked with a small laugh, sitting in the grass beside where Andrew was laying.

"What the hell did you say to coach that pissed him off so bad? He was *brutal* and I swear there was a target on my back." Andrew said with another groan, pulling himself up into a sitting position.

Sapnap and Karl exchanged glances, each trying to stifle their laughter. Apparently Karl calling out coach Brown's homophobic jokes got under his skin more than they even realized.

"I'll go grab you some water." Karl said after a second, still trying to cover his smile with his hand. He made his way up the stairs and inside, leaving Andrew and Sapnap alone.

"Sorry about practice." Sapnap gave an ingenuine apology with a smile plastered on his face. He nudged Andrew with his elbow, raising his eyebrows when Andrew still didn't acknowledge his apology.

"Do me a favor and *then* I'll forgive you." Andrew finally said, a smile growing on his face. Sapnap's smile almost immediately began to fade, unsure of what type of unrealistic favor his brother was going to request.

"What's the favor?" Sapnap asked, squinting his eyes at Andrew.

"Give me \$30 and let me borrow your car tonight." Andrew pitched, his smile continuing to grow.

"What for?" Sapnap asked slowly, tilting his head to the side.

"It's the last night of spring break. I want to go see a movie with a friend." Andrew shrugged, looking away as he said 'friend'.

Karl walked down the front steps, two bottles of water in his hands. He still had the same smile on his face as when he left, clearly proud of his actions from earlier. Karl gave a water bottle to Andrew first, who drank it in its entirety in one go, before holding out the other to Sapnap.

"You know who *loves* movies? Us. How about we go with you and your friend, hmm?" Sapnap said with a smile, accepting the water bottle from Karl. Andrew and Karl both looked at Sapnap in unison, the same puzzled expression on both their faces.

"Oh, actually, uh-"

"Unless maybe this is a *friend* you'd want to be, oh, I don't know... *alone* with?" Sapnap lowered his voice before interrupting Andrew, raising his eyebrows a few times at his brother. Karl sat on the bottom step of the porch, still looking a bit confused.

"If I say you're right does that mean you'll let me?" Andrew reluctantly answered after a minute, keeping his voice just as low.

"Let the car charge for another couple hours and then you can take it." Sapnap said after pretending to ponder his decision for a few seconds.

Andrew's eyes lit up hearing Sapnap agree. He suddenly gained a burst of energy, jumping up from his place in the grass. Sapnap and Karl each laughed a bit when he ran past them, stumbling up the front steps in his haste.

"Easy there!" Jen called out, leaning around Sapnap's dad to give Sapnap a questioning look as to why Andrew was running. Sapnap gave her a shrug, turning his attention back to Karl.

"So, I'm guessing Andrew has a date tonight?" Karl asked, taking the water bottle from Sapnap to have a sip.

"Seems like it." Sapnap smiled, standing up from the ground. He held out a hand to Karl, ignoring the feeling of his dad watching them, as Karl slid his hand across his palm and accepted the help up.

"Looks like we're going to be stuck here for the night." Sapnap sighed, fighting the urge to hang on to Karl's hand after he was standing.

"Honestly, that sounds kind of nice. I feel like we haven't stopped running around since we got

here." Karl laughed, following Sapnap up the stairs and inside. Once they were in the house, Sapnap turned around, pulling Karl towards him. Karl instantly held out his arms, keeping a distance between them.

"*Relax*, Andrew's the only one inside and he's not even down here." Sapnap said quietly with a smile, gently pulling Karl in closer. Karl looked back to the front door and then over to the porch door in the kitchen before slowly lowering his arms and stepping towards Sapnap.

"Well?" Karl asked after a second, letting out a small laugh when Sapnap didn't say anything.

"Nothing, I just wanted to hold you for a minute." Sapnap answered with a soft smile, kissing Karl's cheek before pulling away.

Truthfully, Sapnap's mind was still focused on how Karl was feeling after their heavy conversation earlier. Now that they no longer had the option to leave before Andrew got back, Sapnap was feeling a bit anxious.

He really wanted to check in, to see if Karl was still feeling sure about his decision to stay- but Sapnap didn't want to bring up a sensitive topic out of the blue.

"So, tonight. I'm thinking we play some video games and watch-"

"Karl?" Andrew called out from the top of the stairs, catching both of their attention. Sapnap was a bit confused to see Andrew still in the same clothes from practice- and the fact he was calling out for Karl.

"Uh, yeah?" Karl answered after a minute, looking over to Sapnap, hoping he would have some kind of idea what Andrew wanted. Sapnap shrugged, walking with Karl to the base of the stairs.

"Do you, uh- would you mind maybe... letting me borrow an outfit- or even just helping me pick out something from what I have?" Andrew asked with a bit of a stutter, refusing to make eye contact with either of them as he spoke.

"Really?" Karl asked, practically dumbfounded.

"If you wouldn't mind? It's okay if you don't want to- actually, don't even w-"

"I'd love to!" Karl interrupted, heading up the stairs two at a time. He looked over his shoulder to give Sapnap a bright smile before facing forward again.

"I'll get everything ready down here." Sapnap called out with a laugh, heading back into the living room, while Karl and Andrew headed down the hall.

It wasn't how he was expecting the evening to begin, but Sapnap actually found himself a bit thankful that Karl had a distraction for a while. Plus, seeing Andrew take such a liking to Karl also warmed his heart.

Sapnap made his way into the living room, picking up all the toys and stray pillows off the floor, getting the room put together. He wanted to make sure he and Karl would be able to comfortably hang out down there for a few hours.

He laid out some blankets on the floor, rearranging the pillows in front of the television. It was a balancing act between wanting Karl to be impressed by the effort he put into getting the living room ready, without raising *too* many suspicions in the rest of his family.

Once the seating area was all set up, Sapnap made his way into the kitchen, preparing a few snacks for him and Karl.

"Kuya Nick, will you get me some juice?" Marisol asked, startled Sapnap when she walked into the kitchen through the side door.

"How about some water and *then* you can have juice?" Sapnap laughed, already opening the fridge and cracking open a water bottle for her.

"Oh, are you and Kuya Karl doing another date?" She asked after taking a sip, walking through the kitchen and into the living room, looking at the seating area Sapnap set up.

"It's '*going on*' not '*doing*'." Sapnap corrected with a laugh.

His laugh slowed down after he remembered what Karl said- what Karl asked him *not* to do. He cleared his throat, walking into the living room with Marisol.

"And no, this isn't a date. We're just going to play video games out here for a while, so I wanted to make it more comfortable." Sapnap half-lied, setting down the bowl of chips he poured.

"That's dumb." Marisol turned around, giving Sapnap an almost judgmental looking expression, which managed to pull another laugh out of him.

"What's dumb?" Sapnap asked, walking past her and heading back into the kitchen. He opened the fridge, grabbing a bottle of water for himself and a juice box for Marisol.

"It's dumb that this isn't a date. You know, mom said it's fine if two boys do dates." Marisol said with the same expression, reaching out and accepting the juice

"Mari, it's '*go on*' not d-" Sapnap paused in the middle of correcting her, actually taking a second to register what she said. "Wait- when did she say that?" Sapnap asked.

"A couple weeks ago." Marisol shrugged, taking another sip of the juice box. "We were all at the big mall and dad made that *face*-" She paused, imitating the 'look'. "And then mom called him a word I can't say. But then *after* that she told us that anyone can do- I mean, *go on* dates with anyone. It doesn't matter if they're boys or girls or neither or both or-"

"Okay, I got it." Sapnap said with a small laugh, cutting her off.

"You should ask Kuya Karl for this to be a date. I think he'd like it." Marisol said with a smile and a nod, heading back out onto the porch.

Chapter End Notes

Okay we will **actually** talk about andrew's sexuality on Friday

And the universe said...

Chapter Summary

Andrew opens up to Karl about his 'friend'

Chapter Notes

Please read the end note to this chapter <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"I, uh, don't really have much to choose from- but you're welcome to look through it." Karl said with a small laugh, returning to Andrew's room with his suitcase.

"Thanks for doing this." Andrew said after a second, staring at the suitcase Karl had placed on his bed.

"Yeah, no problem." Karl answered quietly. An awkward silence began to grow as neither of them moved.

"So... what's the vibe you're going for?" Karl asked, breaking the silence. He stepped forward, opening his suitcase. He figured that Andrew wasn't going to be the one to do it, so he may as well start piecing together an outfit.

"Just, uh, casual? You know." Andrew looked away, shoving his hands into his pockets. Karl stopped sifting through his bag, slowly turning around to face Andrew.

It was obvious that Andrew was hoping for more than a 'casual' outfit, considering he recruited Karl's wardrobe and advice. Sappnap may not want to ask Andrew about his sexuality, but that didn't mean Karl couldn't.

"What's their name?" Karl asked, fighting back a smile when Andrew instantly looked down.

"My friend's name?" Andrew asked back after a second, letting out a forced laugh. He finally stepped forward, suddenly appearing to be very interested in Karl's clothing options.

"Yeah, what's-"

"How about this shirt?" Andrew interrupted, clearly picking up the first shirt he saw. Karl let out a small laugh when he realized what Andrew had grabbed.

"Well, *that* would be your brother's t-shirt I slept in the other night. I guess I wasn't paying attention when I was getting my clothes together." Karl smiled, taking the shirt out of Andrew's hand. Karl headed towards Andrew's closet, browsing through his clothes.

"Cameron." Andrew said, sitting on the bed next to Karl's suitcase. Karl paused, quickly resuming flicking through the clothes Andrew had hanging up.

"Okay. How does Cameron dress? Maybe I can build an outfit off of that." Karl asked, looking over his shoulder at Andrew.

"I, uh, don't know." Andrew answered, pulling out a dark green button up from Karl's suitcase.

"You don't know what kind of clothes your friend wears?" Karl laughed, looking at the shirt Andrew had picked. He headed away from the closet, going to Andrew's dresser instead. When Andrew was letting him go through his clothes for the rodeo, he remembered seeing a pair of black jeans, which would go well with that shirt.

"I've only seen Cameron on the field. Their practice starts as soon as football finishes, so we've only really talked when we had our uniforms on." Andrew nodded slowly, looking up when Karl approached with the pants.

"Gold looks better with green than silver." Karl said, handing Andrew the pants and lightly tugging on the silver chain Andrew was wearing. "I've got some necklaces and other jewelry in that pouch." Karl pointed to his suitcase before heading back to shut the dresser drawer.

"Cameron must be a new kid at school, right? Otherwise you would've seen them in class or the halls before." Karl pressed the conversation a bit more, leaning against the dresser. Andrew hesitated for a moment, quickly going back to looking at Karl's jewelry options.

"In a way, yeah." Andrew nodded again, a small smile on his face. Karl squinted at him, trying to decipher what the smile meant. At this point, Karl was sick of the little mind-games everyone in the Armstrong household seemed to *love* playing.

"Okay, I'm not like your brother- I don't do cryptic messages and beating around the bush." Karl finally broke, walking over and sitting on the other side of the bed from Andrew. "When we were getting ready for church this morning, you said *we* would burn- not just me and Sap. Maybe you didn't intentionally word it that way... but if you *did*, I'd really like to hear more about Cameron, if you want to talk about... him." Karl said slowly, finally looking at Andrew.

To Karl's surprise, Andrew let out a relieved sigh, setting down the small bag of jewelry. He shifted on his bed, turning to face Karl.

"I don't know what I'm doing." He looked away from Karl again, running his hands through his hair.

"It's just a date, nothing to stress over." Karl offered with a shrug.

"Cameron's in my grade at school, has been since, like, *kindergarten*. We were never really friends or anything, but everyone knows everyone around here." Andrew started, standing from his bed to pace around the short distance of his room.

"You said that Cameron was a new kid at school?" Karl asked, moving back on the bed to lean against the wall.

"I said *in a way*." Andrew repeated. "Cameron, well, he used to be a girl- sorry, I don't know if that's the right wording." Andrew sighed, bringing a hand up to his forehead.

"Cameron is trans?" Karl asked, tilting his head to the side.

"I feel like shit talking about this, it's not my place to tell people his business. I just-" Andrew paused, pushing his head into his hands.

"You just don't know what you're doing." Karl repeated what Andrew had said a minute ago. Karl was relieved when Andrew let out a scoff in an attempt to mask his laugh. "Start from the beginning and go from there. So, Cameron is trans." Karl confirmed, nodding for Andrew to continue venting.

"Yeah. He, uh, he came out after Christmas break. Everyone at school started giving him a lot of shit for it. I noticed that a lot of his friends stopped talking to him too. I kept thinking that it sucked how all this stuff was happening because of something Cameron never even *asked* for." Andrew halted his pacing, pulling out his desk chair to sit in.

"He has softball practice right after football practice ends- which is *so* messed up anyway, because the school won't let him on the baseball team. Sorry, anyway, I started saying hey when we'd pass each other on the field. Soon those 'heys' turned into small talk and then small talk turned into getting to know each other. Now I can't even *imagine* going a day without talking to him." Andrew explained, a smile returning to his face.

"So, what do you mean when you say you don't know what you're doing?" Karl asked, leaning his head to the side. Andrew's face slowly fell, the look of worry returning.

"I've never considered being with a guy before- not in a bad way or something, it just genuinely never crossed my mind. I'm really confused because it's not like I had a crush on him when he was a girl. Back then, I never even thought he was necessarily, like, *pretty* or something. But now, I see him differently. I *do* think he's pretty. I *do* feel the same way when I see a text from him that I would when a girl I like texts me." Andrew explained, pulling one of his legs to his chest and using the other to sway himself side to side in his chair.

"You don't know what you're doing because you've never liked a boy before?" Karl clarified, moving to sit on the edge of the bed.

"Well, *yeah* that's part of it. I don't know what I'm doing because... I'm afraid that I'm not *seeing* him as a guy. What if the only reason I didn't like him when he was a girl was because I hadn't gotten to know him back then?" Andrew asked, looking at Karl briefly before looking away again.

"Cameron has gone through so much bad stuff the last few months. The *last* thing I want is to be another thing on that list." Andrew admitted, resting his chin on his knee.

"I think..." Karl started, catching Andrew's attention. "That you're way more self aware than any other 16-year-old I've met, *definitely* way more than when I was your age." Karl said with a small smile.

"I don't *feel* like it." Andrew sighed with a small laugh.

"You are." Karl smiled, moving back on the bed to lean against the wall again. "If I'm being honest, I don't think you need to worry about ending up on that list. Really though, it sounds like you're something that helped that list of bad things stop growing."

"Why do you say that?" Andrew asked.

"Because at a time when Cameron's closest friends left him, you were there. It sounds like you've never had any problem seeing Cameron as himself- seeing him as a *guy*. That validation and acceptance means more than you know." Karl answered.

"So, if I like Cameron... and I *do* see him as and understand that he's a guy... what does that make

me- sexuality wise, or whatever?" Andrew asked.

"I don't even know what *my* sexuality is, let alone yours." Karl let out a laugh before continuing. "Until *very* recently, I thought I only liked girls. Sap helped me see things differently- more clearly, I guess. Now, I think I can safely say I like *people*. I like people who let me be myself. I like people like your brother." Karl smiled. As soon as Karl looked over at Andrew, he made a gagging motion to Karl's comment.

"Alright, alright." Karl laughed, getting back to the point of what he was trying to say. "Maybe you were never interested in Cameron before he came out because he couldn't be genuine to who he really is. Maybe for you, it's less about a person's gender and more about who they are." Karl offered.

"I like that. *Genuineness*." Andrew said after a second of processing, a smile growing on his face. "I like genuine people." He repeated, looking back over to Karl.

"See? Isn't *this* so much easier than giving confusing hints and using ambiguous wording." Karl said sarcastically, making Andrew laugh for the first time in a while.

"Yeah, I guess so." Andrew rolled his eyes, standing from his chair.

"Or saying things in Greek for no reason." Karl laughed, more so to himself, knowing Andrew probably wasn't going to relate anymore. "Like I'm supposed to believe '*say agapo*' means bless you." He mumbled.

"Wait, do you mean, Σε αγαπώ (Greek to English translation: I love you)?" Andrew repeated, properly pronouncing the phrase. He turned around quickly, giving Karl his full attention again.

"Yeah... that." Karl answered skeptically. "What does it *actually* mean?" He asked as soon as Andrew couldn't fight back his smile.

"Sorry, Karl. Nick's going to have to explain that one to you himself." Andrew laughed, grabbing the clothes off the bed.

"What?! After all *that*, you're seriously not going to tell me?" Karl called out when Andrew grabbed a towel as well, still laughing to himself.

"I wish I could, really." Andrew shrugged, walking past Karl and opening his bedroom door.

Karl got out of the bed, grumbling under his breath. Just as he was about to go down stairs to Sapnap, Andrew spoke up, poking his head out of the bathroom door frame.

"Karl! Just... say it back to him. If you say it back, he'll tell you what it means." Andrew suggested, a smile plastered on his face.

"If I say it back, he'll tell me? You're sure?" Karl asked with furrowed brows.

"Probably... not. Either way, it'll definitely make him happy." Andrew shrugged, shutting the bathroom door.

okay. so. andrew and his crush cameron.

in no way is andrew transphobic. i chose to use certain language like 'used to be a..' and then him instantly apologizing about his wording because the point is he's *trying*. Keep in mind, andrew is a 16 year old boy born and raised in rural Texas. This is his first time having someone who is trans in his life. He wants to do his best to be a good support and know/say all the right things, but at the end of the day, he's still learning- that's why he mentions being afraid of ending up on the list of bad things.

i also am pulling his fear of not recognizing the other person as their true gender from an experience my friend had (also lmao, yes, my friend and not me, i had a different role in that situation). i feel like when my friend first opened up to me about it... i was kind of confused and offended- like 'wtf obviously you don't see them for who they are if you're questioning this'. honestly, that was really ignorant of me and i'm glad that i was able to take some time to process before actually reacting to my friend. at the end of the day (for both my irl friend and for andrew) this fear that they aren't seeing their crush as their true gender doesn't come from a place of transphobia- it's coming from a place of internalized homophobia directed towards themselves. for andrew (and my friend) this is their first non-hetero 'relationship'- which can make you question a lot. the power of heteronormativity and feeling the need to justify in anyway that you're "still straight" is a powerful, and typically not so great, thing.

Karl is there to not only help andrew see that, yes, he does see Cameron as a guy, but also normalize that exploring your sexuality and not worrying about labels is a really important part of growing.

Idk if anyone looked as deeply into this interaction as i did. but if you found yourself having a negative gut reaction to andrew's perspective, i just wanted to take a second to explain :)

I love you

Chapter Summary

Karl tells Sappnap something unexpected

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Hi." Karl said quietly from the base of the stairs, catching Sappnap's attention. He spun around from his seat in front of the television, facing Karl.

"Hi." Sappnap responded, a smile growing on his face. He could already tell Karl was impressed by the modest set up he had thrown together over the last 20 minutes. Sappnap tapped the spot on the blanket next to him, inviting Karl over.

"This is cute." Karl said quietly once he was seated. He pulled one of the pillows Sappnap had set up to his lap, giving it a light squeeze. Sappnap wasn't sure, but there seemed to be an underlying anxiety to Karl's presence.

"Is it too much? We can just sit on the couch instead if you think this might raise a red flag to my family." Sappnap offered, already pushing himself to stand. Karl reached out, gently placing his hand on Sappnap's forearm.

"It's not too much. Stay." Karl said with a modest smile, nodding his head back to Sappnap's seat. Sappnap lowered himself to sit again, keeping his eyes locked with Karl's.

"Is something wr-"

"*Say agapo.*" Karl interrupted.

"What?" Sappnap asked after a few seconds passed.

"I said, um, *say uh gop oh?*" Karl repeated, clearly trying harder to pronounce the phrase.

"Are you... are you saying 'Σε αγαπώ' (Greek to English translation: I love you)?" Sappnap asked slowly. He found himself inching his hand closer to Karl's until their fingers met. Karl looked down from the touch, turning his hand palm up for Sappnap to hold.

"Yeah, that." Karl answered once Sappnap held his hand.

"Why are you telling me that?" Sappnap asked in a bit of disbelief. He was almost certain that Karl didn't actually know what it meant, but even so. Hearing Karl say 'I love you' in the way he had been saying it, in the *language* he had been saying it in- Sappnap's heart was racing.

"You've said it to me, why can't I say it to you?" Karl asked back. Sappnap wasn't sure if Karl was fidgeting with his fingers in a nervous way or if he was just trying to rub Sappnap's hand in an attempt to calm him down.

"*Oh*, no. You must mean *μωρό μου*, right? You're just trying to call me baby." Sappnap tried to

rationalize, nodding in hopes Karl would join in.

"No, I mean Σε αγαπώ (Greek to English translation: I love you)." Karl shook his head. Sapnap watched the smile on Karl's face grow as the blush on his own face grew. Karl was able to pronounce the phrase much more accurately this time, since he had just heard Sapnap repeat it.

"You don't even know what that means." Sapnap said through an exhale, leaning in closer to Karl. He had reached his other hand over, pulling Karl in slowly by the back of his neck.

"I think I have a pretty good idea." Karl whispered, tilting his chin forward just enough for their lips to graze each other. "Maybe you should tell me though, just to be sure." Karl continued, leaning in further.

Sapnap pulled away just before Karl could kiss him, clearly taking Karl by surprise. Sapnap had started laughing a bit to himself, watching Karl's face fall.

"You have *no* clue. Clever, very clever." Sapnap said with another laugh. Karl instantly furrowed his brows, crossed his arms over his chest, and turned to face the TV.

"I have *some* of a clue. I know it doesn't mean '*bless you*', that's for sure." Karl grumbled, leaning against the couch. Sapnap watched as Karl slumped down, a mixture of a pout and embarrassment on his face.

"Oh, μωρό μου. Σε αγαπώ. (Greek to English translation: Oh, my baby. I love you)." Sapnap laughed, wrapping an arm around Karl's shoulders. He kissed the side of Karl's head before Karl pushed him away for continuing to laugh.

"Okay, okay. Video games or a movie first?" Sapnap asked, leaning forward to grab the remote and the bowl of chips.

"How about a Greek lesson first." Karl pitched in a grumble, an eye roll accompanying his sour tone.

"Video games it is." Sapnap sighed, handing Karl a controller. Karl begrudgingly accepted, adjusting to sit up more in his seat.

They were only able to get through about two rounds of Fall Guys before everyone came in from outside. Ben walked right past them as soon as he saw they were playing a game he wasn't interested in, heading upstairs.

Marisol jumped onto the couch, putting her face directly between their heads. Sapnap was relieved when Jen called out to her before she could not-so-discreetly ask Sapnap if he asked Karl to make this a date.

"Don't fill up on junk, boys." Jen called out over her shoulder once she got Marisol away from them.

"Why? It's just chips anyway." Sapnap said with a shrug, looking at her with a confused expression.

"It's Sunday. Dad *always* makes dinner on Sunday." Marisol called out from halfway up the staircase.

"Right." Sapnap said quietly, turning around in his seat. He could already hear pots and pans clanging around in the kitchen behind him.

Sunday dinners.

They were one of those things that Sapnap had both fond and frightening memories of. Sunday dinners were something that preceded the days of Jen and Marisol living with them. They preceded his dad's sobriety. They preceded his mom leaving.

"Hey." Karl whispered, gently brushing the back of his hand against Sapnap's leg. Sapnap turned his head in Karl's direction, doing his best to push past his feelings of discomfort once he noticed Karl's concern.

"Ready to start another round?" Sapnap asked, trying to disguise his true feelings by offering Karl a smile. Karl didn't seem to be as willing to let Sapnap deflect away from something that was bothering him.

"Tell me what's-"

"So, Karl. Have you ever had souvlaki?" Sapnap's dad called out from the kitchen, interrupting Karl prying.

"Uh-"

"Gyros." Sapnap clarified, facing the television again.

"Oh! Yeah, I love gyros. I'm from New York, so-"

Karl cut himself off when Sapnap's dad began laughing. Sapnap actually let out a bit of a genuine laugh himself. He'd been to New York with Karl plenty of times, so he knew how bad most gyros were there.

"If you like those *knock offs*, then you're going to love these." Sapnap's dad called out. Karl looked at Sapnap, his expression somewhat less concerned when he saw that the smile on Sapnap's face wasn't as forced.

"My dad's a chef. Authentic Greek food is his whole brand." Sapnap explained, peeking into the kitchen to ensure they were in the clear, before holding Karl's hand at his side.

"A chef?" Karl repeated. Sapnap had to hold back a laugh when Karl's attempt at hiding their hands was moving closer to him- not realizing that would be arguably more suspicious.

"He has a few restaurants throughout Houston. *Niko Niko's*." Sapnap said dramatically, using his free hand to make a grand gesture.

"Let me get this straight- your dad is a *chef*... but you can't even pour a bowl of cereal without burning something?" Karl asked, moving away from Sapnap's side to stare at him in disbelief.

"Okay, *okay*- I'm not that bad." Sapnap grumbled, interrupting his dad's laughter from the kitchen. Now he was the one sulking, leaning against the couch with his arms crossed.

"You're right. If toaster companies didn't want people to start fires, they shouldn't have a setting that turns bread into charcoal." Karl teased, trying to console Sapnap.

"Fuck off." Sapnap muttered, moving away from Karl when he tried to pat his back.

Karl reached out and grabbed one of the blankets that was bunched up around their feet, pulling it up to cover both their laps. Sapnap turned to Karl with a raised eyebrow, flicking his gaze over to

the kitchen.

Sapnap looked back at Karl when he felt his hand being pulled to Karl's thigh. Karl tilted his head to the side with a small shrug, turning his attention back to the TV. Sapnap relaxed his hand around Karl's thigh, reaching to take the controller out of Karl's hand.

"We should have time for a movie before dinner's ready." Sapnap said with a smile, already seeming to have forgotten Karl's ruthless comments about his cooking skills.

"Two hours?" Karl asked, clear skepticism in his tone.

"At least." Sapnap's dad called out from the kitchen, taking out more ingredients from the fridge. Sapnap rolled his eyes from the interruption. He was thankful that his dad was preoccupied though, meaning he and Karl could get away with showing a bit more affection.

"Two hours for gyros?" Karl questioned more quietly, hoping that Sapnap would be the one to answer this time.

"He has to marinate the meat and he's probably making fresh pitas from scratch." Sapnap answered, leaning his head against the couch.

"Oh, okay. Can you pick the movie?" Karl asked after a second, resting his hand back on top of Sapnap's, and moving a bit closer to him.

Sapnap gently squeezed Karl's thigh, looking to the kitchen once more. His dad had his back to them, fully enveloped in prepping dinner. He looked back to Karl, his eyes directly drawn to Karl's lips.

He was beginning to feel like he did the first night they arrived- hiding in plain sight, sneaking behind closed doors and under the covers with the boy he liked. Even with his dad one room over, the rest of his family *somewhere* inside the house, all Sapnap could think about was the way his heart skipped a beat from just the thought of leaning forward to kiss Karl.

"Pick. A. Movie." Karl whispered, getting closer with each word. Sapnap found himself instinctively leaning in, his eyes fluttering shut.

"Get. A. Room." Andrew whispered, leaning over the back of the couch.

Sapnap and Karl pulled away from each other instantly, each turning around to face Andrew. His hair was still wet from his shower and he was wearing one of Karl's shirts. Sapnap wasn't positive, but he was pretty sure Andrew was also wearing one of Karl's necklaces.

"Oh, that ended up looking nice." Karl said after a second, moving on from the intrusion. He turned around to get a better look at the full outfit, striking up a conversation with Andrew.

"Andy, I think dad needs help in the kitchen." Sapnap interrupted, giving Andrew an annoyed look. Their dad instantly called over to Andrew, since Sapnap had interrupted loud enough for their dad to overhear.

"What Andrew said wasn't necessarily *wrong*." Karl whispered, turning his attention back to Sapnap. Just like that, Sapnap felt like they were naturally leaning in all over again, eager eyes scanning each other's lips.

"We could put a movie on in my room?" Sapnap pitched, returning his hand to Karl's leg, sliding his palm over his thigh.

"Tell me what that Greek saying means and we can." Karl whispered back. His lips were already insultingly close to Sapnap's.

"I..." Sapnap started, taking the risk of leaning forward, briefly connecting their lips. "Can't do that." Sapnap finished his thought, pulling away.

Karl reached out to grab the sleeve on Sapnap's shirt, preventing him from moving too far away. The look in Karl's eyes nearly made Sapnap cave, tell him right then and there what he had been saying all this time.

"Σε αγαπώ (Greek to English translation: I love you)." Karl said quietly, taking Sapnap off guard.

"Karl, y-you can't keep saying that- you don't know what it means!" Sapnap stuttered, whisper-yelling at Karl. Karl just started to smile, watching the apples of his cheeks brighten and a smile spread across Sapnap's face, no matter how obvious it was that Sapnap was trying to stay serious.

"But you react like *this* when I say it- can you blame me?" Karl answered, resting his head against the couch.

"*Karl*." Sapnap sighed with his eyes closed, resting against the couch as well. He could hear Karl giggling under his breath beside him. Sapnap leaned forward, grabbing the TV remote again, and switching over to Netflix.

He'd be lying if he said he put in any effort into the movie he chose, basically just clicking on the first thing he had saved to his watchlist.

"Why'd you have let him wear *that* shirt?" Sapnap whispered once the opening scene had begun, the sound of the movie covering their conversation.

"What do you mean?" Karl asked back, looking into the kitchen to see Andrew wearing the green button up shirt he packed.

"I love when you wear that shirt, it's *the* green." Sapnap explained, pulling the blanket up a bit further. "Now when you wear it I'm going to think of my brother." He said with an eye roll, linking his arm around Karl's waist.

Karl quickly put a pillow by his side, blocking any view of Sapnap's hand, before turning to face him again.

"Be good and watch the movie." Karl scolded, ignoring Sapnap's complaint. Despite his tone, Sapnap could tell Karl had leaned in a bit closer to him, making his reach more comfortable.

"Μόνο για σένα, αγάπη μου (Greek to English translation: Only for you, my love)." Sapnap whispered in Karl's ear.

"What does-" Karl cut himself off with a sigh, shaking his head as Sapnap's smile continued to grow. "I'm not even going to bother asking." Karl grumbled.

"Really? I was going to tell you if you did." Sapnap shrugged, continuing to watch Karl instead of the movie.

"I've told you before that you're a bad liar." Karl said sarcastically, leaning further into Sapnap's side. Sapnap tightened his grip around Karl's waist, pulling him in a bit closer. He was thankful that Karl's subconscious instinct to be near him seemed to have overpowered his paranoia.

Sapnap continued to steal glances at Karl throughout the movie, carefully monitoring where his family was around them. Marisol and Ben had stayed upstairs, Jen had gone back outside, and Andrew was keeping his dad occupied in the kitchen.

"You haven't watched any of the movie." Karl said about an hour in, turning to his side to see Sapnap watching him instead of the screen, yet again.

"I wonder why." Sapnap whispered back, instinctively reaching over to brush a few hairs behind Karl's ear. Sapnap's hand lingered on the side of Karl's head, mindlessly running his fingers through Karl's hair.

"Σε αγαπώ (Greek to English translation: I love you)." Karl mumbled, looking up just in time to see Sapnap's reaction.

"You're a moron." Sapnap finally answered after taking a second to compose himself.

"Just tell me what it means. I wanna know what I could *possibly* be saying that makes your eyes smile before your mouth." Karl insisted, now also being guilty of paying no attention to the movie.

"Karl-"

"Σε αγαπώ (Greek to English translation: *I love you*)." Karl repeated, watching intently as Sapnap's cheeks bloomed in color all over again.

"κι εγω σε αγαπω (Greek to English translation: I love you too)." Sapnap answered, leaning forward and pressing his lips against Karl's.

It was surreal- hearing Karl repeatedly say 'I love you'. Sapnap knew that Karl had no understanding of the Greek language, meaning Karl didn't realize the specific meaning to the *way* they had been saying 'I love you'. There were different words in Greek for brotherly love, parental love, friendly love- but αγάπη was for *romantic* love.

Just as Sapnap trailed his hand from the side of Karl's face to the back of his neck, pulling him in closer to deepen the kiss, Karl pulled away. Sapnap opened his eyes slowly, doing his best to keep Karl as close to him as possible.

"Your family is right *there*." Karl whispered almost inaudibly. Sapnap flicked his gaze over to the kitchen, spotting his dad kneading the pita dough and Andrew stirring together the tzatziki sauce- neither paying them any mind.

"One more and I'll leave you alone for the rest of the movie." Sapnap offered, sliding his other hand around Karl's waist, attempting to pull him in closer again.

Karl looked over his shoulder, finding Sapnap's dad and brother occupied. Seeing for himself that they weren't paying attention seemed to help Karl relax enough to face Sapnap again.

"*One*." Karl whispered, already leaning back in.

"Maybe two." Sapnap said with a smile, tilting his head to the side.

"Moron." Karl mumbled, their lips already pressed together.

The kiss was noticeably slow, each of them more nervous about being caught than they were willing to admit. Sapnap truly felt like he was a teenager again, getting the chance to live out all the desires he thought he could never experience.

When Karl told him he wanted to help Sapnap create positive memories in Texas, he probably had no idea how *healing* something as simple as a kiss during a movie was for Sapnap.

It healed the part of Sapnap's childhood heart that thought kissing another boy was something to be ashamed of.

It healed the longing Sapnap had always felt, wishing he could have the same experiences his peers were having.

It healed the worry in his mind that he would never be able to live a life where he could love who he wanted.

It healed the slight but persistent fear that no one in this world would ever be able to *genuinely* love him- love him in spite of his flaws, in spite of his insecurities, in spite of his past.

Sapnap would have never guessed that a stolen kiss in the middle of a forgettable movie, while sitting on the living room floor of his childhood home, could affect him so deeply. That kissing the lips of the person who was both his best friend and boyfriend wrapped into one could tie together all the scattered pieces of his heart, making him feel whole for the first time, stitch by stitch.

Chapter End Notes

turns out there are only like 10 lines left of the end poem (meaning 10 chapters)... so i have to throw away my consistency and now chapter lengths are going to greatly vary- most likely all of them will be longer than my usual 1,200-1,500 words. I worked so hard to keeps this slow burn **slow** so i just don't want to rush into an ending when i'm not ready <3

You have played the game well

Chapter Summary

Sapnap and Karl come to a decision about keeping their relationship a secret or not

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"You're dressed like Kuya Karl." Marisol said skeptically once she entered the kitchen. Even though it was only about 6pm, she had already changed into pajamas and Jen had braided her hair like she was ready for bed.

"That's because he helped me decide what to wear tonight." Andrew shrugged, hardly paying any attention to her.

Sapnap and Karl watched their conversation unfold from the other side of the kitchen. Since their movie had finished up a few minutes ago, they decided to just stay and help in the kitchen until dinner was ready. That way they could avoid having any unwanted intrusions if they were to go upstairs.

"Why are you dressed like him? Are you going somewhere? When are you leaving? Are you still staying for din-"

"*Mari.*" Andrew interrupted, clearly overwhelmed by her series of questions.

"I'm just asking." She mumbled, heading over to the other side of the kitchen, where Sapnap and Karl were setting the table.

"I'm going to go see if he's okay." Sapnap said quietly to Karl, trying to hand him the silverware he was holding.

"No, let me instead." Karl whispered back, draping the napkins over Sapnap's arm instead of taking the silverware as he stepped around him. Karl was already to the other side of the kitchen before Sapnap even had time to react.

"Hey, kid." Sapnap said to Marisol when she slumped into one of the seats. It was clear that she was feeling bad about Andrew brushing her off, appearing to find her annoying. Sapnap could understand where Andrew was coming from, though. Andrew and Marisol's age gap was about the same as his and Ben's- and he *definitely* got easily annoyed with Ben when he was a teenager.

"Hi Kuya Nick." Marisol said glumly, resting her head on the table. She only had a second to pout before she sprang up in her seat, looking at Sapnap with a wide smile. Just as Sapnap was about to ask what she was smiling about, she slid out of her chair and under the table.

"Mari, what are you-" Sapnap cut himself off when Marisol poked her head out on his side of the table, waving him down to her level. Sapnap looked over to see Karl and Andrew deep in conversation, so he decided to entertain her.

"Did you ask him?" She whispered, her smile growing once again.

"Ask Andrew about his clothes?" Sapnap asked in return, unsure of what she was referencing. Marisol rolled her eyes in a very obvious way, like she had heard the saying but didn't understand it wasn't meant to be done literally.

"No! Did you ask Kuya Karl to do a date with you?" She asked eagerly, resting her chin in her hands.

"Go on a date." Sapnap corrected with a small smile, peeking over the table to see Andrew and Karl just as preoccupied as before.

"You did?" Marisol asked, using her hands to cover her mouth.

"No, no- I'm just reminding you it's *go on* a date, not *do* a date." Sapnap looked back to her with a laugh, watching her face fall. "Oh, don't give me that face. Just because two people are friends and like spending time together doesn't mean that hanging out has to be a date." Sapnap explained.

"You didn't even ask him, did you?" She asked, disregarding Sapnap's explanation.

"You're right. I actually did quite the opposite. I asked him if he wanted to just sit on the couch instead." Sapnap laughed, taking a seat on the floor next to her. Honestly, his knees were just starting to hurt from squatting for so long.

"Ugh- boys are so *stupid*!" Marisol said dramatically, shaking her head at Sapnap. She was a very expressive kid, Sapnap always thought her reactions were entertaining.

"Why do you say that?" Sapnap asked once Marisol had stopped shaking her head, instead choosing to cross her arms over her chest.

"*Because*-" She said, elongating the word. "Kuya Karl *obviously* wanted it to be a date if he said he wanted to stay where you set up all the cute stuff." She explained in a whisper, looking over her shoulder to where Karl was standing on the other side of the kitchen.

Sapnap looked up just in time to see Karl tap Andrew's back a couple of times, turning to head back to the table. They locked eyes for a second before Karl furrowed his brows and slowed his pace, clearly confused as to why Sapnap was on the floor.

"You know what, let's ask him." Sapnap said to Marisol before waving Karl over to them. He knew Karl was going to give her the same explanation he did, but it would be pretty funny to see him get flustered.

"*Kuya Nick*!" She whispered, shaking her head no dramatically.

"My name should be on the list, it's Karl with a K." Karl said with a laugh, sitting next to Sapnap on the floor. He looked between Sapnap and Marisol, his smile fading a bit when he saw how distraught Marisol appeared to be.

"Go on and ask him." Sapnap said with a laugh, nudging her with his foot.

"Ask me what?" Karl questioned. Sapnap tried to hide his laugh when Marisol huffed, moving the table chair to the side so she could sit directly in front of them.

"Kuya Nick put in a *lot* of effort to make the living room pretty for you guys. He *says* that it was just so you guys could be comfortable- even though it was *clearly* set up all nice for a reason." Marisol whispered the second half, as if Sapnap wouldn't be able to hear her.

"But then Kuya Nick told me that it wasn't a date, so I said that was *dumb* because anyone can do- I mean *go on* dates." Marisol continued her rant, pointing at Sapnap throughout her speech. Every time she pointed at Sapnap, he put his hands up in self defense.

"I don't think I heard a question." Karl said with a laugh when there was a break in Marisol tangent. She let out another groan, like it was obvious what she was getting at.

"The *question* is, if Kuya Nick asked you if the movie could be a date, would you have said yes?" Marisol asked. The way she was looking at Karl reminded Sapnap of the look kids give a parent when they're asking for a ridiculous toy.

"Well... that sure is a question." Karl said with a nervous laugh after a few seconds went by. Sapnap failed at trying to cover up his own laughter with a cough when he heard Karl's awkward response.

"*Shh!*" Marisol scolded, slapping Sapnap's outstretched leg. "Take your time, Kuya Karl." She said, nodding in Karl's direction. Now both of them were trying to hold back their laughter, watching her attempt to act seriously, while wearing a matching Pokémon pajama set.

"I think... if we went on more than one date in a day, that would be a bit too much." Karl said slowly, catching both of their attention. The laughter quickly left Sapnap's voice, as he turned to Karl, completely perplexed.

"But if the movie wouldn't be your first date, what was?" She asked, tilting her head to the side.

Karl turned to Sapnap with a shrug and nervous smile, clearing hoping he would take the lead. Sapnap could tell that Karl was trying his best to push himself towards the idea of being comfortable with people knowing about them. Sapnap nodded at Karl slowly, turning back to Marisol.

Now that it was actually happening, he suddenly started to feel the nerves that weren't present earlier. Sapnap instinctively slid his hand over to Karl's, seeking comfort in the feeling of their fingers brushing over each other.

"Uh, remember when I asked you earlier if you could keep a secret?" Sapnap asked, noticeably lowering his voice when his dad walked back into the kitchen from outside. Andrew jumped into a conversation with him right away, keeping him distracted.

"Yeah?" She said slowly, looking over her shoulder to where Sapnap was staring.

"Well, this is the secret. You said what Karl and I did after church sounded like a date... and it was. Mari, *hey*-" Sapnap paused when Marisol had a huge smile on her face and he wasn't sure if she was about to squeal or not.

"I won't tell, I mean it!" She crossed her hand over her heart to demonstrate her promise, before crawling forward to get out from under the table.

"Does this mean boys aren't so *stupid* after all?" Sapnap asked when she leaned in to give him a hug. Seeing her wholesome reaction to the news helped soothe some of his jittery nerves.

"Uh, *no*. It still took a *girl* for you two *boys* to figure this out." She said with another overly accentuated eye roll. She surprised Karl by giving him a hug as well, before jumping up to her feet and running over to see Sapnap's dad.

"I guess she has a point there." Karl said with a small laugh, looking over to Sapnap.

"You didn't have to do that. You said-"

"I know what I said. But I've, uh, done some thinking and... maybe, if you're *absolutely* sure it's what you want, we can tell them before we go- we *should* tell them before we go." Karl explained, twisting one of the rings on his fingers instead of looking at Sapnap.

"Hey, talk to me. What's on your mind?" Sapnap asked, looking over the table for a second to see if anyone was heading towards them. He reached over, gently brushing his hand over Karl's to stop him from fidgeting.

"I'll tell you later, we should finish setting the table." Karl answered, standing up before Sapnap could pull him back down. Sapnap stood as well, already planning to lead Karl out of the room so they could finish their conversation.

"What on Earth were you two doing under the table?" Sapnap's dad asked with a laugh that contradicted the skeptical look on his face.

"We, uh-"

"We were all having an important meeting under there. They're just old, so they take longer to stand up than I do." Marisol explained, grabbing all their attention. Karl was much more successful at hiding his laughter with a cough than Sapnap was earlier.

"She's not wrong." Sapnap shrugged, doing his best to hold back his smile until his dad looked away. He locked eyes with Marisol briefly, catching her give him a head nod and a quick thumbs-up.

"She's a better wingman than Andrew." Sapnap whispered.

"Shut up." Karl snickered back, reaching for the napkins to help Sapnap finish setting the table. Sapnap held out his arm, blocking the napkins from Karl's reach. Just as Karl turned to him with furrowed brows, Sapnap grabbed the cuff of Karl's sweater, pulling him out of the kitchen.

Sapnap looked over his shoulder at Karl, catching a glimpse of his confusion. He chose to ignore the look, continuing to pull Karl away from his family instead. As voices faded into background noise, Sapnap finally slowed down.

"I want you to talk to me." Sapnap said quietly, peeking around the corner to make sure no one followed them down the hall.

"Sap, we can do this later. We're literally about to have dinner." Karl said with a smile that offered little to no reassurance.

"They can wait, I don't care. Tell me what happened that made you change your mind so quickly." Sapnap turned back around to face Karl, leaning against the wall. Sapnap thought of pulling Karl closer to him, but Karl stepped back instead- almost as though he could read Sapnap's mind.

"I shouldn't be the one to talk to you about it." Karl shrugged. "Really, let's get back to-"

"Then skip the details, I don't need them. Something happened when you were with Andrew and now you have a *completely* different stance on this. Coming out to Mari is one thing, I don't even know if she really understands it fully. Karl, I just want to make sure you're doing this for *you*. Not for me, not for Andrew, not for anyone but yourself." Sapnap interrupted, pushing himself away from the wall to walk towards Karl.

"I just want to do the right thing." Karl said quietly after a few seconds of deliberation, a sigh accompanying his words.

"How could coming out to my family when you're not ready ever be the *right* thing?" Sapnap asked. He reached his hand out to Karl's, grazing his finger's gently across Karl's skin.

"Because if we come out to them now, it will give Andrew an idea of how it's going to go when he comes out to them in the future." Karl answered quietly.

Sapnap stayed quiet for a minute, doing his best to process all the information Karl's simple sentence presented.

One, Andrew wasn't straight- that was now confirmed. Two, Karl was afraid for what might happen to Andrew when he inevitably comes out. And three, Karl was willing to put his own fears aside for his brother.

"He didn't ask me to do this- he doesn't even know I'm asking you about it. I could tell just by looking at him that his nerves are stemming from more than just the date. He's *scared*, Sap." Karl continued. Sapnap shook his head slowly, trying to think of anything that would comfort Karl.

"Andrew's a tough kid, he-"

"But he shouldn't *have* to be tough. He shouldn't *have* to do scary things alone. Andrew, Ben, *you*- none of you should have had to deal with such hard things when you were that young. Just because Andrew *can* handle whatever shit gets thrown his way, doesn't mean he should be expected to." Karl was the one to interrupt now, pulling his hand away from Sapnap's touch.

It wasn't shocking to Sapnap that Karl was standing up for someone- it would be more shocking if Karl *didn't* stand up for what he thought was right. Even so, Sapnap found himself caught between a rock and a hard place.

He could understand Karl's point of wanting to essentially 'test the waters' for how coming out to his family- well, his *dad*, was going to go. He also knew that Karl wasn't ready to see the side of his dad that even he himself hadn't fully recovered from.

"Just because he shouldn't have to be tough, doesn't mean *you* need to be. That being said... if this is something you *really* want to do, I can tell them." Sapnap answered, respecting the space Karl seemed to want by stepping back to lean against the wall again.

Karl looked down, crossing his arms tightly over his chest, almost as though he were trying to hug himself. Sapnap watched Karl's fingers tap his biceps anxiously, longing to reach out and hold them still. He yearned for the opportunity to take all the stress out of Karl's mind.

Karl spoke with actions instead of words, deciding to silently walk over to Sapnap, wrapping both arms around his shoulders. Sapnap had no hesitation in bringing his arms around Karl's waist.

"Tell me not to be scared." Karl whispered.

"I'm not going to let anything bad happen to you." Sapnap whispered back, tightening his grip around Karl.

"What about Andrew? What do we do if this goes as badly as I'm afraid it's going to?" Karl asked. Sapnap could tell by the tremble in Karl's voice that the answer to this question was what's been worrying him.

"I've been protecting Andrew my whole life- just because I moved out doesn't mean that ever stopped. Don't let things that haven't happened yet worry you, αγάπη μου (Greek to English translation: my love)." Sapnap answered, his hand moving in slow circles across Karl's back.

He wanted to stay in this moment, to hold Karl until the worry washed out of his system. Sapnap wished for the chance to recreate the feeling of unfiltered happiness and peace they felt earlier that day. But the sound of footsteps approaching forced them both to pull away.

Sapnap looked around the corner as Karl stepped away, fanning his face with one of his hands. Ben was the one walking down the hall, pausing as soon as he saw his older brother glaring at him from the end of the hall.

"What." Sapnap said flatly, turning around briefly to see Karl still fanning his eyes, his cheeks a bit flushed. He turned back around to face Ben, narrowing his eyes.

"Dad said to come find you. Dinner's ready." Ben answered cautiously, unsure of where Sapnap's sudden hostility came from.

"We'll be back in a minute." Sapnap rolled his eyes, getting ready to face Karl once more

"Jen said that if you said that to tell you-" Ben paused when Sapnap froze, turning his head slowly back in his direction. "Jesus, don't shoot the messenger. Just, hurry up or whatever." Ben continued, walking away backwards from the two.

"He's right. Plus, the longer we keep them waiting, the worse it's going to be." Karl sighed, heading towards the hall. Sapnap grabbed Karl by his wrist, pulling him back to his chest.

"I'll tell them after dinner- *alone*. I'm not dragging you into my family's shit." Sapnap said, resting his palm against Karl's heated cheek.

"Sap, *no*-"

"That's my one condition, I do this by myself. I told you I'm not going to let anything bad happen to you and this is how I can do it. Promise me that after dinner you'll stay upstairs while I talk to them." Sapnap insisted, his voice steady despite his racing heart.

"I promise." Karl answered, leaning his face into Sapnap's hand, his eyes slowly closing. As Sapnap watched the brilliant blue of Karl's eyes disappear behind full lashes, it all began to sink in.

Sapnap was going to do what he never imagined. He was going to come out to his family tonight.

He was going to tell his dad that he's gay.

Chapter End Notes

hi. i missed you

Everything you need is within you

Chapter Summary

Sapnap comes out to his dad and step-mom

Chapter Notes

please be mindful of the tags on this story

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Silverware clanking against ceramic plates, each one glazed a different color. Small talk floated across the table, nothing of value being said. Observations were made about Andrew's abrupt style change and who it seemed to be inspired by, but all Sapnap could focus on was continuing to push around the same few bites of food on his plate.

Sapnap's eyes widened, the conversations that felt far away now coming into full volume, as a hand sliding across his thigh brought him back to reality.

"You feeling okay? You're not eating." Karl said quietly, retracting his hand from Sapnap's leg once he had gained his attention.

"What? Oh, yeah. Everything tastes great, dad." Sapnap said, still in a bit of a daze. His dad accepted the compliment nonetheless, not even noticing that his son had yet to take a bite.

"You didn't even try it." Karl's whisper was almost drowned out by the rising volume of Andrew and Ben trying to talk over each other across the table.

"I've had souvlaki a million times, I know it's good." Sapnap answered, picking up a stray piece of lamb and popping it into his mouth. He gave Karl a small nod towards his own plate, using his fork to poke Karl's food, encouraging him to eat.

"I'm finished, thanks for dinner- great as always!" Andrew said quickly, standing from the table. He grabbed his plate, already heading towards the sink to rinse his dish.

"Now what's the rush? You said the movie doesn't start until 8, it's not even 7." Jen called out, doing her best to keep Ben and Marisol in their seats after they realized Andrew got to leave the table early.

"Cameron lives on the other side of town, it takes a while to get there." Andrew called out over his shoulder, placing his rinsed dishes into the dishwasher.

"Cameron who lives on the other side of town... you don't mean the Baker's daughter, Cammie, do you?" Their dad asked, turning around in his chair to face Andrew. Sapnap furrowed his brows, instantly noticing the way Karl and Andrew's eyes locked from across the room.

Even though it was easily over five years ago at this point, Sapnap couldn't help but think about his

own experience with the Baker family. Back in high school, Sapnap actually went out with Cameron's older sister. It was similar to all his other relationships- short, sweet, and painfully one sided. Even so, he always liked the Baker family. Sapnap just hoped that Andrew and Cammie could have a better relationship than he did with Amy.

"I'm driving out to the Baker's farm, yeah." Andrew said a bit reluctantly. Sapnap rose from his seat, ignoring the inquiries about where he was heading.

"Here." Sapnap said while approaching Andrew, grabbing his wallet off the counter.

"Letting me borrow your car is enough, you don't actually need to give me thirty bucks." Andrew said quietly, watching Sapnap sift through his wallet. Sapnap held out a \$50 bill, pushing it towards Andrew's hand when he didn't readily accept it.

"Nick-"

"Buy her some popcorn too." Sapnap said with a small smile.

"*He* doesn't even like popcorn." Andrew muttered under his breath.

"A slushie or something else th-" Sapnap cut himself off mid sentence, his smile faltering. Andrew looked nervously back over to their family at the table, who were all watching, waiting to be let in on the details of their conversation.

"I guess Karl didn't tell you then." Andrew said quietly, taking the money from Sapnap's hand and shoving it into his pocket.

"I'm going to step out with Andrew for a sec. I need to, uh, show him how to plug in the car for when he gets home." Sapnap called out, nudging Andrew before heading out of the kitchen. Andrew followed behind silently, slipping on Sapnap's pair of white high top vans.

"You're a little shit, you know that?" Sapnap said sarcastically, when he realized Andrew was stealing not only his car but also his shoes for the night.

"Back by 11, I mean it!" Sapnap's dad called out from the dining room, causing both of them to roll their eyes in unison.

"Back by 11, got it." Andrew called back unenthusiastically. Sapnap pushed him onto the front porch, closing the door behind them.

"I know how to charge your car, I plugged it in for you the other day." Andrew said over his shoulder.

"Lying to dad about who you're hanging out with is a one way ticket to getting your ass beat." Sapnap warned, walking closely behind Andrew.

"I'm not lying, I'm going to the movies with Cameron Baker." Andrew shrugged, unplugging the car. Sapnap slowed his pace, falling a few steps behind.

"If you're going to the movies with Cammie, then why does-"

"Cameron *not* Cammie. He doesn't like to be called that anymore." Andrew interrupted, wrapping up the cord to the car, while keeping his back to Sapnap.

"*Oh*." Sapnap said, slowly processing the situation. He took the cord from his brother, tossing it

into the trunk of the car. "Cameron... Cameron's a guy?" Sapnap clarified.

"Yeah, he is." Andrew answered, holding out his hand for the key.

"Hang on a sec, explain-"

"Nick, I really don't have time. Just, tell Karl I said it was okay if he told you. I was kind of hoping he would anyway." Andrew mumbled a bit towards the end, but Sapnap heard him regardless.

Sapnap watched the anxious and uncertain expression on his brother's face twist and turn. It felt like he was looking into a mirror, like he was watching himself from five years ago wonder what all of this meant.

"Andy." Sapnap said, pulling out the key. When Andrew turned back to face him, reaching out to take the key, Sapnap grabbed his wrist and pulled him to his chest.

"Dude, come on-"

"You're going on a date with a guy and that's okay. That's *more* than okay. It's awesome, it's exciting, and it deserves to be celebrated just as much as any other date you've been on. Cameron has always been such a cool kid, I'm not surprised you two hit it off. Be safe, have fun, and remember that this is *normal*." Sapnap explained.

Throughout his pep talk, Andrew slowly stopped fighting against the hug, eventually finding himself leaning into his brother's embrace.

Sapnap wasn't sure how much his words would mean to Andrew, but he just knew that was what he would've wanted to hear at that age. Maybe if he heard that it was okay- that it was *normal* to go on dates with boys, then he wouldn't have had to hurt in silence for so many years.

"Thanks, Nick. I... I needed to hear that." Andrew let out a shaky breath, hitting Sapnap's back a few times before pulling away.

"Get it out." Sapnap said with a smile growing on his face. He started to mirror the way Andrew was flapping his hands at his sides. Andrew let out a laugh, swinging his hands around a bit more. Sapnap joined in, jumping in place and letting out a few cheers.

Andrew also jumped, letting out uninhibited laughter from Sapnap's howling. Sapnap pushed against Andrew's chest a few times, continuing to hype him up.

"Hey- you've got this! You're *Andy Armstrong*! You're going to *crush* this date." Sapnap said, coming down from his laughter, tapping his fist against Andrew's chest a few times.

"I'm going to crush this date." Andrew repeated with a smile growing ear to ear, letting out the last bit of pent up energy he had with a few more hops.

"Love you, kid. Drive safe and try *not* to break his heart like I did Amy's. You *know* how long it took the Bakers to start selling fresh produce to dad again after I did that." Sapnap called out over his shoulder with a laugh, giving Andrew one last thumbs up before he got in the car.

Sapnap stayed on the front porch long enough to watch Andrew head down the driveway, turning towards town. He felt relieved knowing his brother wasn't going through this alone like he had to.

He reentered the house, closing the door behind him. The house felt almost eerily quiet, to the point Sapnap wondered if everyone had left the dining room. Sapnap turned the corner to see

everyone still seated, staring directly at him.

"He's off." Sapnap said awkwardly, returning to his seat at the table. He turned to Karl briefly, quickly putting his attention on the plate of food in front of him instead, while the silence persisted.

"It's a date, right? He's going on a date?" Marisol broke the silence, eagerly asking her question to Sapnap.

"I think you have spring fever or something." Sapnap shrugged with a small laugh that took all his strength to muster up. This entire situation just got so much more complicated.

It was pretty obvious that any word about Cameron being trans hadn't made it to their dad. Honestly, Sapnap was a bit relieved about that. If coming out was going to take a turn for the worse, he was glad that at least their dad thought Andrew was going on a date with a girl.

"That's not a *no*." Marisol said proudly, leaning forward.

"It's also not a yes." Sapnap shook his head. He was grateful for Jen's interruption, instructing Marisol to sit in her chair properly. His dad also rejoined the conversation, asking Ben about a project he was supposed to complete over spring break.

Karl reached over, gently nudging Sapnap's thigh with the back of his hand to get his attention. Sapnap turned to face him, disappointed with how quickly Karl pulled his hand away. As soon as his eyes met Karl's, Karl darted his gaze towards his phone, which was laying face down on the table.

Sapnap reached into his back pocket, thankful that the conversation was flowing between his family again, meaning he could look at his phone without being scolded.

why are u guys yelling? we can kinda hear u

Sapnap's heart began to pound so heavily in his chest that he could hear the blood pumping in his ears. There was only one thing on his mind, spinning through his thoughts on repeat.

Did he just out his brother?

What did you hear?

Sapnap typed as quickly as his fingers would allow. As soon as he pressed send, he locked his phone, holding it tightly against his leg. Karl's phone vibrated on the table not a second later, thankfully only catching Karl's attention, as everyone else dove back into small talk.

Karl furrowed his brows while he read the message, his eyes flicking over to Sapnap. He looked away, scanning over everyone at the table before beginning to type out his response.

Sapnap felt like the seconds were moving by like hours, that Karl was suddenly the world's slowest texter, as he waited for his phone to vibrate in his hand.

uhh just cheering or something? maybe laughing idk

Sapnap let out a nearly audible sigh of relief, locking his phone without responding to Karl's message. All the tension he was holding in his shoulders melted away, allowing him to relax. Sapnap leaned forward, finally beginning to eat his dinner.

"I'm done, can I be excused?" Ben asked, already trying to sneak away from the table. Sapnap

watched their dad give a slight huff but wave his hand anyway, freeing Ben from the rest of dinner.

"I'm actually finished as well. Thank you for dinner, it was really nice. Uh, definitely a lot better than the '*knock offs*' I've had back home." Karl said with a small laugh, standing from the table.

Sapnap turned up to face Karl, chewing his large bite more slowly. He tilted his head to the side when Karl froze, looking increasingly confused at Sapnap.

"Unless you wanted me to stay?" Karl asked, gently lowering his plate back to the table.

At that moment, everything came rushing back to Sapnap. He was so blinded by his relief of not accidentally outing Andrew, he completely forgot he told Karl he would come out to his parents after dinner.

"*No*, no. Sorry, uh, go ahead. I'll catch up with you soon." Sapnap rushed, coughing a bit after he forced himself to swallow his bite a bit prematurely.

"You sure?" Karl asked, picking his plate back up. Sapnap watched Karl fail to maintain eye contact, his vision dancing around the table.

"Totally." Sapnap said with another nod, encouraging Karl to run while he could. Sapnap couldn't help but feel all the muscles in his back tightening again, as the atmosphere began to heavily weigh him down.

"*Mom*, can I go play now? *Please?*" Marisol whined, clearly upset about being one of the last ones at the table. Jen sighed, nodding reluctantly to Marisol's request. Marisol seemed to be completely unaware of the tension in the room, hopping up from the table without a care in the world.

"Thanks for dinner, dad!" She called out, already running up the stairwell.

Sapnap felt exactly like he had at the very beginning of dinner. Silverware scratching against dishware, profound silence, and no one to break it this time but himself.

"I-" Sapnap paused, letting out a cough. He set his napkin over his half eaten plate, pushing it slightly away from him. "I was actually hoping to talk to you both." He finished, refusing to look away from his hands.

"Well?" His dad asked a second later, letting out a dry laugh when the silence only continued to grow after Sapnap spoke up.

"Don't tell us you're leaving early. Nothing came up, right?" Jen asked, setting down her silverware. Without even looking up, Sapnap could tell that Jen's question did a better job of gaining his dad's attention than his announcement.

"No, that's not what I was going to say." Sapnap sighed, leaning back in his chair. "But you might ask that I leave after I say this." He continued, finally mustering up the courage to look his dad in the eyes.

"You know we'd never-"

"Spit it out then." Sapnap's dad interrupted Jen, holding eye contact with Sapnap from across the table. Hearing the edge in his father's voice was already causing unwanted memories to flood back.

"Right." Sapnap said through an exhale. His heart was pounding in his ears and he suddenly felt like he was transported back 10 years. He felt like he was sitting at the table, waiting for a slap

across the face from his father for something as insignificant as failing a math test.

"Nick?" Jen said softly, her voice the complete opposite of his father's. Sapnap wanted to take comfort in Jen's presence, to ground himself with it- reminding himself that things were different now.

"I'm gay." Sapnap blurted out. At least, he thought he did. The room was so quiet, you could hear a pin drop. He debated on saying it again, in case he just imagined saying it the first time.

"Nick." Jen said again, her voice sounding more like a warning. Sapnap looked in her direction, only to be met with her eyes looking directly past him. After a second of processing, Sapnap realized it was his father she was speaking to- that she was *warning*.

"I knew all this online *crap* was going to mess you up." His dad muttered, his silverware clattering against his plate when he dropped the utensils. Sapnap slowly turned to face his father, squinting his eyes at him. To no one's surprise, his dad was refusing to meet Sapnap's gaze.

"This has nothing to do with my job-"

"Oh, *bullshit*. You spend your whole life on the damn computer now, you meet people who you never should've in the first place, and then you turn out like *this*. You spend one year away from home and now you're *gay*?" His dad interrupted.

"Nikolas, do *not* speak to your son that way." Jen spoke up, her voice strong and stable without being raised.

"*Video games* didn't make me gay. *Moving* didn't make me gay. *My friends* didn't make me gay." Sapnap said back to his father, desperate for him to look him in the eyes.

"You've always had *girlfriends*- hell, you were a player throughout high school! How am I supposed to believe that you suddenly being gay has nothing to do with your life choices as of recent-"

"Charlie Johnson." Sapnap interrupted. For some reason, the name caught his dad's attention, finally pulling his father's eyes to Sapnap's. Sapnap shook his head as he watched his father's eyes stare at him with disapproval, his throat already beginning to feel tight.

"Sixth grade, late March, Charlie Johnson moved to town. I've known I was gay since I met him. I've known I was gay since I was 12 years old and the highlight of my day was sitting next to the pretty boy in my history class. I've known I was gay since-"

Sapnap didn't get the chance to finish his sentence, due to the back of his father's hand slapping him across the face. The sound of Sapnap's plate falling to the floor, shattering, echoed through the dining room, and it was suddenly as quiet as before the conversation started.

"I knew I needed to *hide* that I was gay at school because Charlie got bullied *so badly*, he needed to be home schooled. He was bullied to the point where he tried to take his own life." Sapnap broke the silence, wiping away the small amount of blood from his split lip.

"And I've known I needed to hide that I was gay from *you* because of this exact reason." Sapnap continued, finally looking up at his father, who was still leaned over the table.

His dad was staring at him with a look of disbelief. The unsettling part was the look didn't seem to be directed at Sapnap, but *himself*. It looked as though his dad couldn't believe he had actually just reacted that way.

Sapnap didn't even realize Jen had left the table until he felt a cool washcloth press against his face, startling him.

"Let's get you cleaned up, sweetheart." Jen said quietly, keeping her back completely turned towards his dad. Sapnap looked up to see the whites of Jen's eyes completely red, tears threatening to fall at any moment.

By listening to her voice, you would never know. Jen always had a calmness to her- a sense of peace and belonging that she was able to pass along to any person she spoke to. Sapnap couldn't even think of a single time he saw Jen cry before now.

"I'm sorry." Sapnap said under his breath, his eyes still locked with Jen's. A smile forced its way onto her face, as she shook her head no, continuing to dab away the small amount of blood Sapnap had smeared across his face.

"Don't say that. You are *not* the one who needs to apologize right now." Jen said a bit louder this time, still refusing to turn around and look at his dad. It wasn't until the shock had started to fade away that Sapnap realized Jen had actually put herself between them, blocking Sapnap's view of his dad entirely.

"Jenny, I-"

"Don't you *dare* apologize to *me*, when I am wiping the blood off of your *son's* face." Jen interrupted, her voice still steady. Although Sapnap's dad couldn't see, Sapnap watched as the first tear fell from Jen's eye. It didn't even have the chance to completely roll down her cheek before she quickly swept it away, resuming the task of holding the wet rag against Sapnap's face.

"I should go." Sapnap said in a bit of a haze, slowly pushing himself away from Jen, standing from the table. She retracted her hand as he stood, looking up at Sapnap with one thought clearly on her mind.

Please don't leave.

"No, no. I should go- I *need* to go." Sapnap's dad interjected, already stepping away from the table, his chair scraping against the floor as he stepped back.

"And where are you going to go Nick?" Jen asked, finally turning around to face him. He shook his head, not answering her question. Jen let out a small scoff, setting down the rag on the table.

"Dad." Sapnap spoke up, catching both of their attention. His dad has just grabbed a jacket, his hand suspended in the air to grab his car keys.

"You can't use this as an excuse to drink. I won't be your scapegoat for throwing away 6 years of sobriety." Sapnap finished, staring his dad in the eyes.

Without another word, Sapnap's dad picked his keys up off the ring, and headed out the front door. Sapnap let out a breath he had no idea he had been holding in, practically falling over on himself.

"Hey, it's alright. It's over now." Jen said quietly, the comforting and soothing tone of her voice returning. She reached her arms around Sapnap's shoulders, gently pulling him down to her level.

It felt foreign to Sapnap- having a parental figure try to comfort him. His arms wrapped around her in stiff movements, finding it hard to trust that the embrace would be accompanied by any relief.

"I love you so much, Nick. You've done nothing but make me proud since I first met you. You are

brave, you are kind, and my *god* you are never allowed to apologize to me about who you love again." Jen hushed, holding onto Sapnap tighter, despite his rigid stance.

"And most importantly, you aren't going to let how anyone else in the world sees you affect you negatively. Not even your father- *especially* not your father." Jen continued, pulling away.

Sapnap wasn't sure why, but his arms were refusing to let her go. Even if he didn't consciously feel any comfort from the embrace, there was clearly something deep inside of him that longed to be supported, to be told it was all going to be okay, to have a mother hold him while he cried.

Jen didn't need a verbal confirmation of this to wrap her arms back around Sapnap's shoulders. He was able to ease more into her embrace this time, resting his forehead against her shoulder.

"I'm sorry he's going to get drunk because of me." Sapnap whispered, fighting back the tears of guilt.

"That choice is your father's and your father's *alone* to make. If he drinks, that's because of him, not you." She instantly refuted.

"I still think I should go." Sapnap said after giving himself one more second to take in the feeling of parental assurance.

"You don't need to leave because of his behavior... that being said, I'd never ask you to stay if you feel unsafe. Especially considering we don't know if your father will be in his right mind when he gets back." Jen explained, taking a step back as Sapnap pulled away.

"I'll get Karl and then-" Sapnap paused, letting out a sigh. "Andrew isn't going to be back for a few hours and he has my car." Sapnap closed his eyes, resting his forehead in the palm of his hand.

"I can drive you and Karl to town to pick up your car and-"

"No, no. It's okay. Andrew was really looking forward to tonight, I don't want to mess up his first date." Sapnap pulled his face from his hand, checking his watch. It was only 7:45pm, meaning the movie hadn't even started yet.

"Andrew's actually been on quite a few dates. I guess he's like his older brother in that way." Jen said with a small smile, nudging Sapnap's arm. "Especially since this date is with a boy." Jen's expression softened.

"Oh?" Sapnap said with upward inflection, doing his best to sound surprised by the information.

"You don't have to act like you don't know, he and I have talked about this." Jen clarified, bending down to carefully pick up the broken pieces of the plate that fell off the table.

"He didn't clear the computer's search history after looking up articles about transitioning as a teenager. I thought he was questioning if *he* was trans, so I talked to him about it. He told me all about Cameron, how he was being treated at school, and how he wanted to learn more so he could be a good friend to him. He also *may* have mentioned that he realized he was starting to get feelings for him." Jen explained, standing up once all the large pieces were collected.

"And?" Sapnap asked, watching Jen walk through the kitchen.

"*And* that's all. I made sure he was okay, he was feeling safe, and he knew this wasn't anything that he should feel ashamed or embarrassed about. Other than that, he's come to me with questions a couple of times, but nothing more. I didn't ask him if this was a date, but once I saw him in Karl's

clothes, I knew he was trying to impress *someone*." Jen shrugged, grabbing a broom.

"That's all?" Sapnap repeated, still processing their conversation.

"Andrew doesn't seem like he's ready to make any decisions about his sexuality. I fear that if I ask him about things too much or too often, he'll feel like he has to give me an answer. If I'm concerned about something, I ask him, but other than that, I keep the ball in his court. He knows he can come to me with anything if and when he's ready." Jen said with a smile. Her words seemed to calm her down as she mindlessly swept up the broken glass.

Considering how calm and rational his and Jen's conversation had been, it almost felt unfeasible to imagine that the broken glass on the floor was from the near screaming match he and his father just had, which resulted in him being slapped by his dad for the first time in nearly a decade.

"I'm glad that Andy and Ben have you here. I feel better knowing that they have someone like you helping raise them." Sapnap said quietly, reaching out and resting a hand on Jen's shoulder.

"*You* raised those boys, Nick. I hope you're as proud as I am about how they turned out." Jen said with a smile, turning around to face Sapnap once again.

"I don't say it as much as I should, but I love you, Jen." Sapnap answered quietly, holding open his arms for her. She readily accepted the hug and Sapnap found it much easier to relax his arms around her, resting his chin on the top of her head.

"I love you too, sweetheart." She sighed, rubbing a few circles on Sapnap's back before stepping away, picking up the dust pan off the floor.

"I'm going to get some fresh air for a minute." Sapnap said over his shoulder, heading to the side door.

He pushed on the old screen door, listening to the all too familiar squeak be drowned out by the overwhelming sounds of crickets chirping and a light rain. Sapnap made his way to the porch railing, leaning against the warped wood.

It was almost unfathomable to think it had only been a couple of days since he and Karl kissed for the first time, here on this porch, leaning against this railing. So much of his life had changed in such a short amount of time. It made him question-

"Is your face okay?"

Sapnap turned to look down the porch, seeing his dad seated on the porch swing. Even in the low light from the dim bulb of the porch light, Sapnap could see the remorse written on his dad's face.

"It will be." Sapnap said shortly.

No matter how much Jen assured him that it was completely his father's decision at the end of the day on whether or not he drinks, Sapnap still felt uneasy seeing his father. He feared that any wrong move could send his father off to the town bar, seeing that he had apparently decided against going.

"How about you... are you okay?" His dad asked, looking away from Sapnap, like he knew he didn't deserve to hear the answer after what he had done.

"I will be." Sapnap answered in the same tone. He wished that Jen would look his way, see him through the kitchen window, and take over consoling his father. This conversation was the last

thing Sapnap wanted to partake in.

"I didn't know I still had that in me. I really didn't think I was capable of hitting someone- hitting my *child* anymore. I guess now I know I can't blame the scotch for that." He sighed, letting out an almost dry laugh, his face quickly falling again.

"Why didn't you leave?" Sapnap asked, leaning against the railing to face the field again. With the growing rain, the sky covered in dark clouds, it was nearly pitch black outside.

"Andy." His dad answered almost immediately. Sapnap turned around again, looking at his dad, confused. It wasn't a bad answer by any means, it just wasn't what he expected. Jen, Mari, his 6 year chip- *those* were the reasons he expected his dad to say.

"Well, Andy and *you*. I can't think about taking a drink without seeing blood running down your brother's face from that night. I'm reminded of it every time I see that scar through his eyebrow. Then there's *you*. I wanted to tear down this piece of crap years ago, but it's another reminder for me why I can't drink. I see this swing and think of my 8 year old boy hiding out here with the landline, listening to your mother and I fight like we were the children in the house." Sapnap's dad explained, tapping the old wooden porch swing a few times before wiping his eyes.

"I didn't think you knew I did that." Sapnap said after a moment of silence passed.

"Who else would be calling 911? Nearest neighbors are over a mile away. Plus, you were never a very sneaky kid." Sapnap's dad said with another dry laugh.

Sapnap thought back on the few memories he unfortunately held onto, remembering all the times he let the door swing shut behind him or would cause the floorboards to creak.

"I guess part of me hoped you'd notice. Hope you'd realize what I was doing and stop." Sapnap turned to face his dad again, crossing his arms over his chest, as a cool breeze blew by, misting rain onto his skin.

"I was a selfish man back then. A selfish, miserable, man, who didn't appreciate the things I had- the *people* I had. I like to think I'm not that man anymore, but I guess I'm still working on that." He answered, also crossing his arms over his chest.

Silence grew between them, and for once in his life, Sapnap didn't feel suffocated by it. In a way, it seemed like their dynamic had shifted, like he was the one with the power in the situation. Sapnap knew he could walk away at any moment.

"I'm not saying I knew you were *gay*, but I have suspected for a while that you weren't totally *straight*." Sapnap's dad broke the silence this time, turning to look at Sapnap. "I noticed the way you looked at boys for the first time when you went to your junior prom. When we all drove up to the lake to take your photos, I realized your attention was on your date's *brother* and not her. After that, I saw it more often and just... chose to ignore it. I chose to be ignorant." He sighed, looking away and roughly rubbing the stubble that lined his jaw.

"You can't *ignore* the gay away. Trust me, I tried. I ignored it, I prayed about it, I forced myself into straight relationships to hide it. This is who I am, dad. That isn't going to change." Sapnap said, doing his best to channel the strong but level voice that Jen used.

"I know that... now." He answered, tilting his head back and closing his eyes.

"Right." Sapnap did his best to suppress his annoyance, keeping his tone unpolluted.

"So, *Karl*. He, uh, he your boyfriend or something?" His dad asked, furrowing his brows a bit but keeping his tone neutral.

"Yes, Karl is my boyfriend." Sapnap answered. He almost instinctively said no, having to remind himself that he and Karl *were* together, that it wasn't just an idealized fantasy anymore.

"And that... *he* makes you happy?" His dad asked, his brows not tensing this time.

"*Happy* would be the understatement of the year." Sapnap said a bit reluctantly, trying to muster up a laugh.

"That's good, that's good." His dad answered slowly. "And you, you treat him nice? You make him happy?" His dad asked, looking in Sapnap's direction.

"You know, that was one of the first things that Andy let me know when I got here. He told me that Karl looked at me like he was in love with me. Andrew said he knew what that looked like because Karl looks at me the way you look at Jen." Sapnap answered with a small smile, choosing to face the field while he spoke. His expression softened, like thoughts of Karl were enough to take his mind off the fact he was having this conversation with his *dad*.

"Are you?" His dad asked softly, his voice blending in with the pitter-patter of rain pelting against the porch's tin lined overhang.

"What?" Sapnap asked, focusing back on his dad.

"Are you two in love?" He asked, no longer rocking the swing.

Sapnap let out a small laugh, looking back over the railing. Even in the rain, he could see the fireflies weaving between the overgrown flowers. Their modest amount of light was enough for him to catch the purple hue of the wild bluebonnets.

"I'm in love with him. I've known that since the first time I met him. I know Karl *has* love for me, but I wouldn't say he's *in* love with me... yet." Sapnap turned around briefly with a smile, catching a glimpse of his dad's content face before looking back out to the field.

"I've actually been telling him I love him in Greek, you know, 'Σε αγαπώ'. I bet it was Andy who gave him the idea, but Karl started saying it back to me, even though he has *no* clue what it means." Sapnap continued with a small laugh.

"You probably don't need to hide behind the language barrier. Your brother isn't the only one who's noticed the way he looks at you." His dad said, giving Sapnap a small smile, his lips pressed into a thin line, before standing with a groan.

"Well, I need to get back in there before Jen dusts off the divorce papers." He sighed, heading towards the side door.

"Best of luck with *that*." Sapnap scoffed at his dad's ill-timed joke, letting out a deep breath.

It had been taking all of Sapnap's mental energy to keep up the image he wasn't still unfathomably angry with his dad. That he was so irate he had to physically hold the porch railing to stop himself from walking away in the middle of their conversation.

"Son-" His dad paused, turning around with his hand still on the door handle. "I'm sorry for what I said and for laying my hands on you like that. I wish there was something more I could say, a word that was deeper than just *sorry*. I'm lucky to call myself your dad, it's a title I sure as hell didn't

earn, seeing that I didn't do much good when it came to parenting you. I know I may be stuck in some small minded thinking sometimes, but I'm working on it- Jen's helping me work on it. I don't care that you're gay, son. I just care that you're happy." His dad spoke behind him, but Sapnap continued to face the field, nodding his head once his dad finished.

The porch door swung open and closed with the same creaking Sapnap had committed to memory. He took in a deep breath of the spring air, feeling the cool mist contrast with the hot tears rolling down his cheeks.

Chapter End Notes

please don't murder me for this chapter

to take a break from the angst, friday's chapter is going to be a little spin off about andrew and cameron's date/their backstory <3

ALSO: to clarify, yes charlie the 6th grade gay awakening boy and charlie the cowboy are the same person. the reason there's so much animosity between them is because they both ended up being gay but charlie was the only one who was harassed for it. even though sapnap didnt start or partake in the rumor, he didn't do anything to defend charlie- fearful that people would call him gay as well. that burned a bridge between them.

Bonus Chapter: Andrew and Cameron's date

Chapter Summary

How Andrew asked Cameron to go on a date with him and the build up to that date

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Crap, crap, crap." Andrew muttered under his breath, glancing over at the car's display. It was already quarter after seven and he was still about ten minutes away from Cameron's house. He was tempted to let his foot weigh more heavily on the gas pedal, ultimately choosing to use cruise control to avoid speeding.

Andrew had felt a level of healthy confidence after getting a pep talk from his older brother, but now he was feeling just as panicked as when he first asked Cameron to see a movie with him.

"-for spring break?"

Andrew blinked a few times zoning back into his conversation with Cameron. They had been sitting on the floor, side by side, waiting for Cameron's dad to pick him up. Andrew wanted to offer him a ride home, but he had to drive Marisol that afternoon.

"What'd you ask? Sorry, I was, uh-"

"You have the attention span of a goldfish, I swear to god." Cameron interrupted with a laugh, facing away from Andrew to hide his smile.

Andrew wanted to tell him that the issue wasn't he couldn't focus- it was just that he couldn't focus on their conversation when Cameron looked like that.

Andrew had been completely focused on Cameron's new haircut. He found himself admiring the confidence it seemed to have given Cameron to the point that he wasn't actually listening to the words he was saying.

"Yeah, yeah. So what did you wanna know about break?" Andrew said after a minute, scooching closer to Cameron so he could bump his shoulder against his, regaining his attention.

"I asked if you had any plans for spring break. You know, like traveling and stuff." Cameron answered.

Andrew was already having a difficult time staying focused on the conversation again, too consumed by the way Cameron didn't move away from him after Andrew had moved closer.

It was a priority to Andrew to make sure he treated Cameron the same way he treated any of his other guy friends, which meant being comfortable with being close to him. This would have been fine, had Andrew not realized how much he enjoyed being close to him, more so than any of his other guy friends.

"Oh my god, you're doing it again!" Cameron laughed, pushing against Andrew's shoulder.

Cameron decided to move so he was sitting across from Andrew instead of by his side, leaning against the wall behind him.

Even if he no longer got to feel Cameron pressed against his side, he was happy the new seating arrangement meant he could look at him head on. Andrew could admire for hours the-

"Incoming call from Cam"

Andrew was startled by the announcement interrupting his daydream, quickly hitting the accept call button on the display.

"Hey." Andrew said quickly, already beginning to instinctively adjust his appearance, due to his nerves.

"Hey, uh, just seeing if you're still picking me up. It's almost 7:30." Cameron said with a slight apprehension in his tone. Andrew was really kicking himself, seeing that this was the first time he and Cameron were hanging out outside of school. He wanted to make a good impression, but clearly that was already fading.

"Yeah, I'm just about there. My GPS says- oh. It says I'm here." Andrew slowed down, seeing the upcoming turn into the driveway. His heart was pounding all over again, as Cameron's house came into view.

"What? I'm not doing anything!" Andrew laughed, turning to face Cameron.

"That's the issue, you idiot." Cameron laughed. "Whatever, I don't care what you're doing for break-"

"Hey!"

"I just wanted to tell you that I'm going to Mexico for the week." Cameron dismissed Andrew's offense, continuing his thought.

Andrew watched the smile on Cameron's face grow, while his began to fade. It was disappointing enough not being able to see Cameron at school for a week, but now he wasn't even going to be in the country?

"That's... that's super cool, I'm definitely jealous. I haven't even been out of the country since I was a kid." Andrew answered, maintaining a conscious effort to keep a smile on his face.

"We're literally still kids." Cameron rolled his eyes, his smile unfaltering.

"You know what I mean, like kid kids. I went to Greece a few times, but I haven't really traveled anywhere outside of Texas since. The beach in Mexico sounds like the perfect place to escape to." Andrew extended his leg, nudging Cameron's foot with his own.

"Right, the beach." Cameron's face fell a bit flat, as he looked away from Andrew.

"Is that something that's going to be hard for you? Going to a beach?" Andrew asked. "Shit, ignore me, that's a stupid question and-"

"I wish I was like you- wish I looked like you." Cameron interrupted, pulling both his legs to his chest so he could rest his chin on his knees.

"Cam, don't say that." Andrew assured, reaching out and setting a hand on one of Cameron's

knees. To his surprise, Cameron tilted his head, resting the side of his face on Andrew's hand.

"Why? I mean it." Cameron mumbled. Andrew wanted nothing more than to reach out his other hand, to run his thumb across Cameron's cheek, to trail his fingers through Cameron's freshly cut hair, and tell him all the reason he loved the way Cameron looked now.

"If it makes you feel any better, I don't think I've ever taken my shirt off at the beach or a pool party." Andrew said quietly, doing his best to scoot forward without moving his hand too much. He pulled one knee to his chest, hugging his other arm around his leg.

"Why?" Cameron asked, tilting his head to the side so he could look at Andrew, while still keeping his head leaned against Andrew's hand.

"Gotta maintain this pasty complexion somehow." Andrew said sarcastically, a small smile growing on his lips when Cameron laughed. "But really? I don't know, I guess I just don't like how I look." Andrew answered more honestly, looking away out of embarrassment.

"What are you talking about?" Cameron asked in disbelief, sitting up straight. "You're so tall and fit and attra-" He cut himself off with a cough, leaning back up against the wall. "Uh, I just mean... you're all the things a lot of people want to look like, if that's any reassurance." Cameron finished, rubbing the back of his neck.

Andrew looked away before Cameron had even finished his thought. He wasn't positive, but he was pretty sure Cameron was about to call him attractive. Andrew was well aware of the feelings he had developed for Cameron over the last few months, but he wasn't expecting his cheeks to feel this warm from an incomplete compliment.

"Maybe." Andrew said quietly, his hand still lingering on Cameron's knee. As much as he didn't want to, Andrew pulled his hand away, also using it to hug the leg he had pulled to his chest.

"If you want, you can take my UV shirt with you. Honestly, it'd probably be smart to wear one at the beach anyway." Andrew pitched after a second, watching Cameron slowly look back at him.

"A UV shirt?" He asked. Despite how serious their conversation had been, Andrew had to actively fight back a smile from seeing Cameron's adorable confused-face. He loved the little pout Cameron wore when he was thinking about something.

"Yeah, a UV shirt, you know. They're those special shirts that people wear when they're at the beach, or hiking, or doing anything where you're in the sun for a while. Think of it as, like, if sunscreen was a shirt." Andrew explained, switching out which leg he had pulled to his chest.

"Guys wear those?" Cameron asked, lowering his own legs, now sitting cross legged.

"I literally just said you could borrow mine and last I checked, I'm a dude." Andrew teased. The smile that grew on Cameron's face, the way he always turned to the side and put his head down when he was embarrassed, never failed to make Andrew's heart beat a little faster.

"How do you always know the right thing to say? Sometimes I wish I could keep a pocket sized version of you with me all the time, that way I could get 'Andrew-pep-talks' whenever I needed." Cameron said with a laugh under his breath, relaxing against the wall. He extended one of his legs, making it so he could repeatedly bump his foot against the leg Andrew didn't have pulled to his chest.

"I think I'm pretty pocket-sized right now, what are you talking about?" Andrew scoffed, pretending to be offended. Cameron shook his head, dismissing Andrew's act.

"To be honest, even if beaches and body issues weren't a thing, I think I'd still rather spend my spring break here." Cameron admitted. He stopped tapping Andrew's foot against thigh but didn't pull it away. Andrew looked down when the motion stopped, noticing Cameron's shoe was untied.

"Right, because why would you ever want to be on a tropical beach when you could hang out in wheat fields next to cow shit all week instead?" Andrew asked sarcastically, reaching over and retying Cameron's shoe.

"Sounds like a perfect spring break to me- wheat fields, cow shit, and you." Cameron laughed, pushing Andrew's hands away from his shoe. "You're nearly 17 and you still tie shoes with bunny ears? You know, that knot doesn't-"

Andrew found himself guilty of zoning out mid conversation again, focusing in on the one detail Cameron changed. Wheat fields, cow shit, and him. Cameron's ideal spring break included hanging out with him too.

"Let's go to the movies when you get back." Andrew interrupted, watching intently as Cameron's hands froze, tangled in his laces.

"The movies?" Cameron asked after a second, quickly resuming the task at hand. Andrew was pretty sure it was just an excuse for him to not have to make eye contact with him.

"Yeah. You'll be back, what? Saturday? Sunday? I'll pick you up and we can go to a movie that night. That way we'll be able to say we at least hung out once over spring break." Andrew pitched.

After Cameron fumbled the knot on his shoe for the third time in a row, Andrew gently brushed his hands away. He tied the shoe and readjusted Cameron's pant leg over his high-top converse.

"Fuck." Cameron mumbled, pulling out his phone. "It's my dad, he's here to get me." Cameron sighed, pulling his leg away from Andrew, and pushing himself up to stand.

"I should probably head out too. I have to pick up Mari for dance on my way home anyway." Andrew agreed, turning around to get his backpack.

"Sunday." Cameron spoke up, catching Andrew's attention. Andrew looked up at him as soon as he was done zipping up his bag, also standing. "I get back on Sunday." Cameron clarified.

"I'll pick you up on Sunday then. 7:30." Andrew said with a smile.

"7:30." Cameron nodded, taking a few steps backwards towards the exit before turning around and jogging away.

"Oh, yeah, I see a car coming up the driveway now." Cameron said. "I'll see you in a sec then."

Andrew hummed in agreement, just as the call disconnected before him. He did his best to take a few deep breaths, trying to calm down his heart as he pulled up to the house.

It was a date. It was just a date. Hell- maybe it wasn't even a date in Cameron's eyes. Maybe he's just seeing this as two friends going to the-

"Long time no see, huh?" Cameron said as he opened the car door.

"It's like I don't even recognize you." Andrew tried to muster up a laugh but it instantly got caught in his throat.

As soon as Cameron sat down, he brought forward the hand he had been holding behind his back, revealing a modest bouquet of hand-picked flowers.

"Here, I, um, I grabbed you these. They're cardinal flowers and, well, I don't know, you said your favorite color is red, so I kind of just went with it." Cameron said with an obviously nervous laugh, pushing the flowers towards Andrew's hands.

"You picked me flowers?" Andrew asked, running his hands over Cameron's as he accepted the small bouquet.

"Just as a, uh, thank you- you know, for picking me up. I live kind of far away." Cameron explained, leaning back in his seat.

Andrew brought the bouquet to his nose, taking in the lightly floral scent. This was the first time anyone had ever given him flowers- hell, he wasn't sure if he'd ever even given anyone else flowers before.

"Thanks, Cam. I really like them- seriously." Andrew said with a smile, looking over to Cameron in his seat.

"I'm glad." Cameron smiled back, his eyes flicking down to Andrew's outfit. "So, this is how *Andy Armstrong* dresses off the field? You clean up better than I was expecting, very nice." Cameron teased, gently tugging on Karl's gold chain he had borrowed.

"Yeah, well you can expect to see me in my usual shorts and t-shirt tomorrow." Andrew looked away, not quite sure if Cameron was giving him a genuine compliment or making fun of him.

Cameron was wearing a pair of dark wash jeans, a gray hoodie, and a flannel. Andrew was beginning to feel a bit embarrassed for dressing so far from his usual attire, seeing that Cameron was wearing pretty much what he wore at school.

"So, whose car did you steal? I've only seen you drive a truck and an SUV before." Cameron switched the subject, pulling the seat belt around himself. Andrew took this as his cue to start driving, so he gently laid the bouquet on the back seat and began heading down the driveway.

"My older brother is in town, he said I could borrow his car for our- um, for the movie." Andrew corrected himself, still feeling unsure of whether Cameron viewed this as a date or not.

"I forgot you had an older brother. He's the same age as my oldest sister right? Pretty sure she dated a Nate Armstrong, now that I think about it." Cameron questioned. Andrew watched through the corner of his eye as Cameron began poking around the car a bit.

"*Nick* not Nate." Andrew corrected with a light laugh. "But yeah, they dated for a minute, I guess." Andrew shrugged. He reached out to shoo Cameron's hand away from the glove box, but Cameron grabbed his hand back instead.

Andrew tried his best to not be too obvious about how he was rapidly looking between the road and their loosely held hands. Cameron was using both his hands to hold his, running his fingers over Karl's jewelry.

"Rings too? Who *are* you?" Cameron asked with a laugh, spinning one of the rings around Andrew's finger. Andrew pulled his hand away and placed it back on the wheel, knowing he wouldn't have the self control to not fully hold Cameron's hand otherwise.

"I'm *officially* only ever going to wear pajamas around you." Andrew grumbled, getting a laugh out

of Cameron.

"You know, it's kinda weird to think our siblings dated and now we're... going to the movies together." Cameron stated, no longer snooping through the car. His attention now seemed to be fixed on Andrew, like he was waiting for a reaction.

Andrew was beginning to go crazy in his mind, trying to figure out if Cameron was intentionally comparing their siblings dating to now. If Andrew didn't understand Karl's point earlier, he sure did now. Not being straight forward *sucks*.

Maybe Karl was right. Maybe sometimes it's just easier to rip off the bandage.

"Yeah, uh, Nick told me I better not mess things up with you like he did with Amy." Andrew responded, keeping his eyes on the road and both hands on the wheel. He could only hope that Cameron wouldn't notice how painfully rigid his body language was.

"Wow, really laid on the pressure, didn't he?" Cameron laughed, his voice sounding a bit more nervous now than it did before.

The lights of their small town were beginning to come into view, the sky just barely holding onto any remnant of light. The theater was only another few minutes away and Andrew had made practically no progress in figuring out if this was casual or a date.

"What are older brothers for?" Andrew rolled his eyes, turning to give Cameron a sarcastic smile. Cameron reached out, pushing Andrew's face so he would be looking at the road instead of at him.

Andrew looked back at the road, biting the inside of his cheek when Cameron's hand lingered on his shoulder for a second before he pulled away.

Even when he had gone on dates with girls before, he had never felt so on edge. It was like he was overanalyzing every small detail, every interaction, every-

"Where ya going?" Cameron asked with a laugh that seemed to be a bit forced, reaching out and tapping Andrew's arm.

"Huh? *Oh*, shit. My bad." Andrew blinked rapidly, realizing he had driven straight past the theater. He turned onto the upcoming side road, getting ready to head back towards the theater.

"Wait." Cameron said quietly, holding out his hand to block Andrew from reaching the shifter.

"You okay?" Andrew asked, looking around them to make sure no one else was on the road. As expected for a Sunday evening, the town was fairly vacant.

"Not really." Cameron sighed, pulling his hand away and slumping back in his seat. Andrew took one last look around before putting the car in park and leaning back as well.

"What's wrong?" Andrew asked. He was doing his best to stay zoned in, to not be distracted by how nice Cameron looked. Even without dressing up, he still looked great. It actually looked like he had gotten a bit of a tan on his vacation, making his freckles stand out just a bit more. Andrew really wanted to ask him about the beach.

"I'm sorry if I got the wrong idea about tonight." Cameron sighed, covering his face with his hands.

"What?" Andrew questioned, genuinely confused on what Cameron was talking about.

"I-" Cameron started, pausing to take a deep breath. "I thought that... *maybe* this was a date. I'm starting to think I was just being dumb and looked too deep into your invitation. Sorry about the flowers and the compliments and-"

"Oh, thank god." Andrew interrupted, a relieved sigh following his words, as he leaned against the car door.

"Sorry..." Cameron said slowly, turning to face forward.

"What? No- *no!*" Andrew rushed, reaching out to grab Cameron's hand. "I'm relieved because you *do* see this as a date- not because you were apologizing." He clarified, letting out a small laugh.

"So, this *is* a date?" Cameron asked after a second, looking down to their loosely held hands.

"I mean, that's what I was going for when I asked you out tonight. I actually had my brother's uh, *friend* dress me up for tonight and everything. I... I was hoping you'd be, I don't know, impressed?" Andrew cleared his throat, looking away.

"Are you sure about it being a date? I mean, you kind of looked uncomfortable whenever I said or did anything." Cameron asked slowly, their hands remaining still in their half held position.

"I'm not uncomfortable, I promise. I've just never been on a date with a guy before, so this is all new to me." Andrew said slowly, turning to face Cameron again.

"I've never been on a date *as* a guy before, so same here." Cameron shrugged. Andrew decided to bite the bullet, fully intertwining his fingers around Cameron's hand. He was noticeably relieved when Cameron tightened his grip around his hand back.

"I'm glad it's you that I'm figuring this all out with." Cameron said quietly, looking away from their hands and back up at Andrew.

"Really?" He asked, feeling both surprised and moved at the same time.

"Of course, you idiot." Cameron shook his head, a smile finally returning to his face.

"Okay, no need to be *rude*." Andrew laughed, pulling apart their hands with a sarcastic eye roll. Cameron seemed unbothered, adjusting in his seat to sit forward again. Andrew threw the car into drive and headed back to the theater.

Even though it was just a couple minute drive back into town, Cameron reached over to take Andrew's hand, holding it in his own. Andrew did his best to keep his eyes on the road, all too aware that the passing street lights were exposing the grin on his face.

"*Oh*." Cameron said just as they pulled into the theater parking lot.

"Is something wr- *oh*." Andrew stopped mid sentence, his eyes landing where Cameron was staring.

The car's display read the time as 8:40pm, meaning the movie had started without them. Andrew slowly turned to face Cameron, giving his hand a light squeeze. Andrew was surprised to see a smile growing on Cameron's face.

"Is it bad I'm kind of glad we missed the show time? I honestly just missed *talking* to you and you can't really talk during a movie." Cameron admitted, biting back his smile when he turned to look

at Andrew.

"Can't wait to tell everyone that our first date was us *talking*." Andrew teased, effectively making Cameron laugh and pull apart their hands.

"Keep that up and it'll go from 'first' to 'first and *only*'." He said with an eye roll, a laugh soon following.

Andrew watched with an expression he was sure gave away all the feelings he had been hiding, unable to stop himself from admiring Cameron. He admired so much more than his looks- truly seeing the beauty and strength to all parts of who Cameron is.

Andrew already knew this date wouldn't be their 'first and only' but instead the 'first of many'.

Chapter End Notes

ah, my awkward children. i love them sm

You are stronger than you know

Chapter Summary

Karl comforts Sapnap

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Stop *fucking* crying." Sapnap mumbled to himself, continuing to aggressively wipe the tears that had yet to stop rolling down his cheeks.

Only a modest amount of light radiated across the porch. The electrical buzz from the lone lantern had finally been drowned out by the sound of the rain pouring down, pattering against the porch's awning.

His dad had gone back inside long ago, all the lights downstairs had been turned off, and the skies had opened, moving from a soft rain shower to a full on downpour. There was no doubt in his mind that he was still in shock, waiting to wake up in his bed in Florida.

He actually came out to his dad.

He came out to his dad, he was slapped across the face, and now he couldn't stop crying.

As much as Sapnap told himself that his father's apology meant something to him, it didn't. Hearing his dad ask him about his and Karl's relationship, even offering him advice, it did the opposite of warm Sapnap's heart. It made his blood boil.

Sapnap winced as he wiped away the next round of tears, pushing a bit too harshly against his tender cheek.

"Fucking pathetic." He muttered, gripping onto the railing. At this point, Sapnap didn't even know if he was insulting himself or his father. Maybe both.

The breeze that he once welcomed now brought goosebumps to his skin, a chill crawling up his spine. Sapnap wished he wasn't feeling this way- he was so incredibly *pissed* at himself for feeling this way. All things considered, the events of this evening were considerably less traumatic than all the scenarios he created in his mind.

At the end of the day, his dad accepted him. He supported him. He gave Sapnap and Karl's relationship his blessing. Sapnap didn't realize those were *not* things he wanted.

He didn't want his dad to care about his relationship. He didn't want his dad to think his approval meant something to him. Sapnap didn't *want* his dad to think his opinions held any value in his life anymore.

In the back of his mind, he had locked away any hope of his father accepting him. He locked it up so tightly, it had suffocated and faded away completely. Now that he had his acceptance, there was no place for it to go. The part of his heart that used to hold onto that hope had been replaced with spite.

Sapnap sank down to the porch floor, sitting on the splintering wood. The mist that came off the thickening rain added to the cold growing inside of him, radiating from his heart. There was one thought on repeat in his mind, swirling around more violently than the clouds in the stormy sky.

Why can't I just let myself be happy?

Even if the misted rain and occasional gust of wind dampened his skin, Sapnap refused to move away from the railing. He found it better to be in the rain's path than to acknowledge that the true reason his cheeks were damp was because of the tears that had yet to stop.

"Sap? Are you out h-" Karl spoke from behind, cutting himself off with a small gasp as soon as Sapnap turned around to face him.

"Shit, Karl. It's fine, I swear I'm-"

Sapnap paused after he pulled himself back up to stand, wrapping his arms around Karl, who had rushed to his side. Karl pulled away after a second, gently turning Sapnap's face towards the light.

"Nick, I'm so-"

"Don't *Nick* me." Sapnap interrupted, nudging away Karl's hand so he could rest his face in the crook of Karl's neck.

If there was one thing Sapnap was thankful for, it was that his need to protect Karl always outweighed his need to protect himself, meaning he finally stopped crying. Even his subconscious was aware that Karl would internalize every tear he shed.

"I'm so sorry." Karl whispered, gently resting his arms back around Sapnap's shoulders.

"Don't apologize for him." Sapnap mumbled, letting out an extended sigh, pulling away from Karl.

"I'm apologizing because you did this for me- because I *asked* you to. My god, your *face*." Karl explained with pain in his voice, reaching out to hold Sapnap's face in his hand, gently running his thumb over the bruised skin.

Sapnap held onto Karl's wrist, debating on pulling his hand away or not. He didn't want Karl to feel any blame for this. Sapnap was nearly to the point where he was ready to cry again, this time from sheer frustration that he couldn't think of a way to *fix* this.

"Here, sit- sit." Sapnap urged, pulling away from Karl's touch. He continued to hold Karl's wrist, guiding him to the porch swing. Karl followed closely behind, sitting on the swing beside him.

Sapnap hated the way he could tell Karl wasn't looking at him, but instead looking at the mark his father left behind.

"It probably looks a lot worse than it is. It was just one slap, really it's-"

"Don't say '*just one*' like that makes it okay." Karl interrupted, reaching out and running his thumb across Sapnap's lower lip, grazing over the scabbed blood from where his lip split.

"I'm not saying it's *justified*, I'm just saying it pales in comparison to other shit he's done. Seriously, I've had worse done to me from being caught skipping class." Sapnap shrugged, trying to muster up a smile. His expression fell flat as soon as he saw the look on Karl's face, quickly realizing he was just scaring Karl further instead of calming him down.

"Shit- sorry, I didn't mean... *fuck*." Sapnap sighed, leaning back in the seat, making the swing squeak loud enough to be heard over the rain. In trying to fix the issue, Sapnap seemed to have only made it worse.

"I thought... I thought you told me everything that night we sat out here- all the bad things that happened to you here. You're saying there was *more*?" Karl asked, reaching out to turn Sapnap's face towards him again. Sapnap welcomed Karl's touch this time, hoping it would soothe him.

"It takes a lot for someone to never want to return home." Sapnap said quietly, looking up at Karl. He watched as Karl had to drag his eyes away from his bruised cheek, forcing himself to meet Sapnap's gaze.

"How do I help?" Karl asked, his thumb slowing down on Sapnap's jaw.

"You can kiss me." Sapnap said with a small smile that only seemed to appear on half his mouth.

Karl didn't question the suggestion, leaning forward to connect their lips. Sapnap winced once Karl pushed against his lip, quickly reaching out to hold Karl's face in his hands, preventing him from pulling away.

"It's okay, I want this." Sapnap whispered, leaning forward to connect their lips again.

He could tell Karl was noticeably more hesitant this time, his lips hardly moving against his own. Sapnap was torn, crossed between appreciating the delicate approach Karl had taken and wanting to kiss Karl so deeply he would be reminded why all the events of this evening were worth it.

Sapnap didn't even realize when he slid one of his hands from Karl's cheek to the back of his neck, pulling him in closer. Karl placed one of his hands onto Sapnap's shoulders in a way that felt apprehensive, like he was afraid of getting too close.

It felt like Karl was afraid a breeze blowing by would be enough to cause Sapnap to fall to pieces.

Even though he wanted to pull Karl in closer, to kiss him until his split lip reopened, to *show* Karl just how much his dad's opinion didn't affect him, Sapnap decided to pull away instead.

He could recognize that the thoughts he was having were just impulses to cover up how he was really feeling. That his dad's reaction hurt him far worse emotionally than it did physically.

"Σε αγαπώ (Greek to English translation: I love you)." Sapnap mumbled, pulling back just enough to look Karl in the eyes. Just when Sapnap could tell Karl was going to speak, he leaned in again, reconnecting their lips.

"Nick-"

"Stop calling me that." Sapnap sighed, resting his head on Karl's shoulder again. Karl wrapped his arms around Sapnap, resting one of his hands on the back of Sapnap's head. Sapnap closed his eyes as soon as Karl began mindlessly twirling a few of his curls between his fingers.

"You know I love you, right?" Karl asked, resting his cheek on the top of Sapnap's head.

Sapnap's eyes shot open, as he found himself too stunned to move. Was it just a coincidence that Karl asked that right after he said I love you in Greek? Or was it Karl's way of hinting that he knew what Sapnap had been saying?

"Always." Sapnap answered, trying his best to push those anxious thoughts to the back of his mind.

"I want to go." Karl said after a second of silence passed, only the sound of the rain between them.

"Go where?" Sapnap asked, finding himself genuinely relaxing in Karl's arms. The shock was beginning to wear off and the exhaustion from crying had completely worn him out.

"No, Sap. I want to *go*." Karl repeated. Sapnap opened his heavy eyelids in slow blinks, pulling his head off Karl's chest.

"You want to leave Texas?" Sapnap asked, his brows knit together. He watched Karl's eyes flick down to his bruised cheek, then over to his split lip, before meeting his gaze once more.

"Don't you?" Karl asked, aware that Sapnap noticed his attention was drawn to the marks his father left behind. Karl reached out, holding Sapnap's face in his hands.

"If that's what you want, the decision to leave is up to you. Making sure you feel safe is the only thing I care about anymore." Sapnap whispered towards the end, his voice nearly drowned out by the first low roll of thunder. He brought his hand up to pull Karl's away from his cheek, bringing it to his lips instead. Sapnap kissed the back of Karl's hand once before lowering it to their laps.

"That's not true." Karl shook his head, his voice also hushed.

Sapnap sighed, looking over towards the edge of the porch, watching the way the rain slid off the roof like a waterfall. Karl was right. He still cared about his brothers. He cared about Jen and Marisol. He cared about his friends and the people who supported him.

As much as he hated it, part of him even still cared about his dad.

"Things would be easier if it *was* true." Sapnap sighed, looking back at Karl. The look on Karl's face was potentially the saddest smile Sapnap had ever seen. The sight alone made his heart ache. The sadness felt like it was stemming from a place deeper than just their conversation, like there was a deep rooted disappointment Karl wasn't acknowledging.

"We don't have to leave. I know how much you've liked it here and-"

"Sap, *please*-"

"I'm not scared, Karl. The night had a rough start, yeah... but it didn't end all too bad. I'm not in a rush to leave early for any reason related to tonight. Tell me a reason you want to leave *other than* how you felt when you first saw me out here- then we can go." Sapnap said, squeezing Karl's hand in his own.

"If you're not going to prioritize yourself, *someone* has to." Karl urged, squeezing Sapnap's hand back.

"Tell me *you* want to leave and I'll drive us away as soon as Andrew pulls in. And I mean what *you* want, not what you think is best for me." Sapnap said quietly, leaning forward to rest his forehead against Karl's.

"I-" Karl started, pausing to sigh. Karl tilted his chin forward, gently bringing their lips together for a short but tender kiss. As soon as their lips parted, Karl put his forehead back against Sapnap's, gently shaking his head 'no'.

"Alright, let's go to bed then, yeah?" Sapnap pitched, pulling away slowly. He gave Karl his signature half-smile, reaching forward to tuck one of Karl's waves behind his ear.

"Before we go, can you tell me how the conversation went?" Karl asked, tightening his grip on Sapnap's arm to prevent him from standing.

"*Karl*." Sapnap spoke his name through a sigh, leaning his head to the side with sullen eyes.

"You asked me not to be there for it and I followed through on my word. You don't need to tell me everything that was said *verbatim*, just, at the very least give me the highlights." Karl pleaded, his eyes mirroring the same crestfallen expression as Sapnap.

"Why would I insist you not be there if I wanted to give you a play by play after?" Sapnap asked somewhat rhetorically. He continued to run his fingers through Karl's hair, knowing that if Karl kept up that expression, he would end up doing whatever he asked.

"What did you just say about not assuming what's best for the other?" Karl asked back, his tone mirroring Sapnap's. He sighed, knowing that Karl did have a point.

"I don't know why you want to hear this. He was *angry* when I said I'm gay. He blamed my job, he blamed the internet, he blamed my friends- honestly, I was surprised he didn't blame *himself*." Sapnap scoffed. "He insisted that it was my own life choices over the last couple of years that '*turned*' me gay." He continued, leaning back on the swing, rocking the two of them slowly.

"What did you say?" Karl asked, leaning into Sapnap's side. He wrapped his arm around Karl tightly, rubbing Karl's arm in an attempt to warm him up. Now that they were sitting on the swing, they were at least out of the rain's reach.

"I told him that I realized I liked boys long before streaming and YouTube, before meeting most of my friends. Told him that I've known I was gay since I met Charlie in the 6th grade. How meeting him made me realize that I was only capable of having feelings like that for another *boy*." Sapnap shrugged, looking away.

"Wait... Charlie? You don't mean-" Karl spoke slowly, pulling away from Sapnap's side. Sapnap tightened his grip, instantly pulling Karl back in.

"Charlie Johnson, yeah. We have, uh, a *complicated* history." Sapnap explained once Karl relaxed in his arms.

"At the rodeo, the tension between you guys wasn't actually about me then, was it?" Karl asked. He stayed leaned against Sapnap's side but tilted his face up to look at Sapnap.

"Well, yes and no. Do you *really* want to talk about this? I mean, you said the other day how much you hated it when I talked to you about Rose." Sapnap deflected, unwrapping his arm from around Karl rest his head in his hand.

"That was different. We're together now, there's nothing for me to get jealous over- right?" Karl asked, making Sapnap smile. It was such a small thing, but hearing Karl casually talk about getting jealous over him dating someone else, it reminded Sapnap that this was *real*.

"Nothing." Sapnap confirmed, lifting his head from his hand. Karl didn't hesitate in wrapping Sapnap's arm back around his shoulders, leaning his back against Sapnap's chest.

"Okay. Charlie and I... we were just kids when we met, not even teenagers yet. Needless to say, when you put two kids who don't realize they're gay together- they're going to... I don't know, do things that they don't even realize are '*gay*'." Sapnap tried to explain, laughing under his breath when he saw Karl's expression, realizing he was *not* following along.

"Charlie held my hand in class one time, I kind of panicked from it. I had only just realized that I had a crush on him and-" Sapnap cut himself off with a sigh, his smile fading. "What was actually excited nerves was viewed as uncomfortability by our peers and... someone started a rumor that Charlie was gay." Sapnap closed his eyes. No matter how many times he told the story, it never hurt any less.

"Middle school is a hard enough time for people, adding in the fact this is *Texas*- that rumor went too far too quick. Charlie was bullied, harassed, hurt... and I was no help. I didn't partake in the bullying but I never did anything to stop it. I was afraid that if I tried, then everyone would start calling *me* gay. I figured that would be even worse, seeing that I *actually* am and at the time, I didn't know he was too." Sapnap continued, looking away as soon as he saw a glimpse of Karl's face.

Standing up for people was something Karl was extremely passionate about- something he had *always* been passionate about. There was no doubt in Sapnap's mind that if Karl were in a similar situation, even at that age, he would have stepped in. It pained Sapnap to know that he was disappointing Karl, but he knew lying to him would be worse.

"Charlie was homeschooled after the bullying got really bad. We didn't talk for a few years but ended up reconnecting one summer when we both worked on a farm together. But... he wasn't the same sweet and shy kid from history class anymore. He was, well, *Charlie*- the one you met." Sapnap emphasized.

"What does that mean?" Karl asked, breaking his silence for the first time in a while.

"It means he had completely changed. He was charismatic, outspoken, confident- arguably cocky. The biggest change was he was *out*. He took what people used against him and made it his whole personality. That was how I found out he's gay, which made me feel even worse. I had always told myself the rumors probably didn't effect him *that* much, since he wasn't gay. Turned out I was wrong in more ways than one." Sapnap closed his eyes, resting his head against the back of the swing.

"I know you think I'm upset, but I'm not. I don't know what you lived through or what it was like to grow up in a place like this. I'm not judging you, I just want to understand. *All* I've ever wanted is to understand." Karl said, pulling away from Sapnap's chest.

"Look at me." Karl urged, running his hand up Sapnap's chest. He opened his eyes like he was instructed, seeing Karl smiling softly at him.

"Kiss me." Sapnap said quietly, brushing a few hairs out of Karl's face. Karl shook his head, letting out a laugh when Sapnap noticeably pouted.

"Finish your story and then you can have a kiss." Karl said, turning back around to rest against Sapnap's chest again.

"*Fine*. Anyway, back to tonight, I told my dad about Charlie, about how I realized I was gay when I was so young, and... I guess he didn't like that very much." Sapnap sighed.

"That was when he hit you, wasn't it?" Karl asked, turning and wrapping one arm around Sapnap's torso to hug him.

"Yeah, yeah it was." Sapnap sighed, tilting his head back and closing his eyes. "Then, I basically explained how his reaction was exactly why I knew I could never stay here. He didn't say much after that, he just, *left*." Sapnap turned to kiss the top of Karl's head before resting his chin on it.

"I thought... I thought you said it *didn't* end badly?" Karl asked.

"It didn't. I talked with Jen for a while, calmed down a bit. When I came out to the porch for some fresh air, he was out here. Turned out he never left after all. My dad asked if I was okay, he apologized in his own way, I guess." Sapnap paused, lifting his chin off Karl's head.

"Hell, he even seemed interested in hearing about our relationship." Sapnap scoffed as he shook his head, feeling the anger rising in his chest all over again.

"Why does that make you mad?" Karl asked, trying to bring Sapnap back down to Earth. He faced Karl again, seeing him already looking up at him.

"Because it's not his place. Because he lost his *right* to insert himself into our relationship the second the back of his hand met my face." Sapnap continued to shake his head, looking away from Karl when the tears of hurt and anger began welling in his eyes again.

"Sap-"

"What- did he think that was supposed to *mean* something to me? Did he think that after *everything* he's put me through, I *wanted* his approval, his acceptance, his goddamn *blessing*?" Sapnap's voice cracked just before a few tears escaped him. He ignored the pain that radiated across his cheek when he wiped his face aggressively.

"Hey now-"

"Maybe a more naïve, a more *hopeful* version of myself would've wanted this. The younger version of me who craved validation and the ability to make his father proud- *he* would be ecstatic that coming out was only one slap and a half-assed apology. That kid has been gone for years and my dad didn't even notice." Sapnap finished.

He could taste the metallic flavor of blood in his mouth from his split lip reopening. Karl's hands were running gently over his face, wiping each tear as it fell. Karl had turned around fully, so his chest was pressed to Sapnap's, as he was now sitting on his knees. Sapnap looked up at Karl for less than a second before he felt his lip begin to quiver.

"I'm here. I'm here with you." Karl said quietly, allowing Sapnap to bury his face in his chest. He wrapped both his arms tightly around Karl's waist, pulling him flush against himself. Karl swung one of his legs over Sapnap's thighs, making it so he could sit on his lap and hug him closer.

Sapnap hated this. He hated worrying Karl. He hated crying. He hated the way his heart hurt.

He also loved it. He loved how Karl knew exactly what he needed and was ready to do whatever he could to make that happen. He loved the way it felt to be held in the arms of someone he loved while he cried. He loved that Karl was able to provide him with the comfort he had been desperately searching for all night.

He loved Karl.

A few more cracks of thunder rumbled through the night sky, the rain seeming to get a bit heavier. It all felt like background noise compared to the way Karl continued to hush him, whispering sweet nothings in his ear.

Karl was telling him things like, '*it's okay now*' and '*you're the strongest person I know*'. The one phrase that Sapnap held onto was Karl saying '*I love you*' over and over and over again.

"I'm s-"

"I swear to *god* if you say sorry." Karl interrupted, hugging Sapnap's face tighter against his chest.

Sapnap held his tongue, continuing to regulate his breathing, trying his best to sync it with Karl's. He tried to focus on the feeling of Karl's fingers raking through his hair, instead of the feeling of tears rolling down his cheeks.

"Thank you." Sapnap settled on instead, letting out one more shaky breath before pulling away. Karl instantly took to tidying Sapnap's appearance, brushing hairs out of his face and drying his cheeks.

"You don't have to thank me for loving you." Karl said gently, his words delicate and light. His tone alone was enough to already begin the healing process for Sapnap.

"But I *do*. I never want you to think I'm taking this- I'm taking *you* for granted." Sapnap explained, angling his head upwards towards Karl. Even though his tears had dried and his lip was no longer bleeding, Karl continued to lightly graze his hands over Sapnap's skin.

"Take it for granted all you want. My love is always going to be here for you. *I* am always going to be here for you." Karl answered in a whisper, his thumb pausing on Sapnap's cheek.

Sapnap slowly slid one of his hands from Karl's waist to the side of Karl's neck. Their eyes failed to remain locked the closer they got, each leaning in.

"I love you." Sapnap breathed, pulling Karl forward to eliminate the remaining space between their lips. Karl kissed him the same way he always did for the first few seconds but that quickly changed, resulting in him breaking the kiss far sooner than Sapnap would have liked.

"You love me?" Karl asked, keeping his lips just out of Sapnap's reach.

"Of course I do." Sapnap answered, refusing to look Karl in the eyes. He instead kept his vision fixed on the lips in front of him, craving for them to be pressed against his own.

"Don't joke about that." Karl shook his head leaning forward. Even though Sapnap was just thinking about how badly he wanted Karl's lips on his skin, he found himself gently pushing Karl away. He was thankful Karl didn't pull away completely, just leaving the same sliver of air between them.

"I'm not joking, Karl. I love you- I've been *telling you* I love you. Σε αγαπώ (Greek to English translation: I love you)." Sapnap explained, shamelessly stealing kisses throughout his sentences. Karl slid both his hands from around Sapnap's shoulders to rest them on his chest, pulling away just enough to see his eyes.

"Σε αγαπώ means I love you." Karl confirmed.

Sapnap nodded, longing to reach up and pull Karl's face down to his. He wanted desperately to just *show* Karl how much he loved him. He knew his lips could do a much better job proving it without talking.

"We've said 'I love you' practically since we met, how do I-"

"It's different in Greek. Saying I love you to a friend would be Σε φιλία. But Σε αγαπώ- that's specific for *romantic* love. I should've told you sooner, even before you started saying it to me. Look, I'm in no way expecting you to say it back, I just- I'm sick of lying. I'm sick of *hiding*."

Sapnap clarified, tightening his grip around Karl's waist with one hand, gently rubbing his thumb against Karl's jaw with the other.

"You love me." Karl repeated, his tone less questioning and his body relaxing into Sapnap's embrace as he leaned forward.

"I love you." Sapnap confirmed, reconnecting their lips.

Chapter End Notes

hurt comfort *and* a confession? I'm spoiling you guys

You are the daylight

Chapter Summary

Sapnap and Karl find themselves in a difficult situation when Andrew gets home and asks how Sapnap was hurt.

... and also some like spicy fluff

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Pouring rain had lightened to a gentle drizzle. Rumbling thunder had quieted to an occasional murmur in the distance. The ringing of the windchimes had softened into soothing background music.

The only part of the night which hadn't changed was the way Sapnap and Karl were holding each other, lips pressed together, sitting chest to chest, breathing each other in. Karl found himself never wanting to leave Sapnap's embrace.

He had never felt more *secure* in his life.

Sapnap loved him. He finally admitted that he loved him.

Karl had essentially known what Σε αγαπώ meant since before the first time Sapnap said it to him. He was just waiting for Sapnap to be ready for him to know. When he landed in Texas, hours before Sapnap had even crossed the state line, he overheard a conversation between Sapnap's dad and step-mom.

Karl and Marisol were in the backseat, eagerly opening one of the packs of Pokémon cards, when a call from Sapnap's dad rang through the bluetooth.

"Hi, hun. I just picked up Karl from the airport, you're on speaker." Jen answered, looking at Karl through the rearview mirror. Karl could tell by the way her eyes were squinted that she still had a smile on her face.

"Oh, alright. Just checking in. I wanted to let you know I ran to the store and got-" He continued. Karl did his best to tune out their conversation, figuring it would be rude to eavesdrop during his first time meeting Sapnap's family. It wasn't until the conversation was ending that Karl's attention peaked.

"Drive safe, see you all at home. Σε αγαπώ." Sapnap's dad said, the sound of a few yelling kids coming into hearing range.

"I will. Mahal din kita." Jen answered, a laugh woven between her words after hearing the childish arguing going on in the background.

"Mahal kita, dad!" Marisol called out, looking away from the cards for the first time since they

were opened. Jen leaned forward, ending the call on the display.

"What does ma-hall-key-tah mean?" Karl asked, doing his best to pronounce the phrase.

"It means I love you in Filipino. Mom says mahal kita and dad says Σε αγαπώ because that means I love you in Greek." Marisol answered, looking forward to get her mom's approval on the Greek pronunciation.

"Aw, that's really sweet." Karl said with a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. There was something so beautiful to him about that- about telling someone you love them in the language you grew up hearing it in.

The porch swing continued to sway gently beneath them, acting as the only thing tying them to the ground.

As slightly calloused hands slipped beneath the waistband of his sweater, grazing their way over his skin, Karl pulled away from Sapnap kiss. Sapnap leaned forward, lightly pecking Karl's lips a few times, doing his best to draw him back in.

"Say it again." Karl felt like he was hearing someone else use his voice, completely unaware he had made the request. Sapnap unintentionally squeezed Karl's waist when he laughed under his breath.

"I love you." Sapnap answered. Karl's eyes fluttered shut, his head falling to the side, when Sapnap began peppering his neck with kisses.

"I love you, Karl." Sapnap said again, his face still pressed into the crook of Karl's neck, kissing his way to his jaw.

Karl wove his fingers through Sapnap's hair in sync with Sapnap's hands trailing their way up his back. He had never told Sapnap he enjoyed these things- neck kisses, slow hands, the light scratch of fingernails on his skin.

Karl was also discovering new things he enjoyed. He was surprised to find the tickle of Sapnap's facial hair against his neck to be a sensation he craved the second it was gone. Being impossibly close was something Karl knew he liked, but he didn't realize how much he preferred to be in this position- to be sitting in someone's lap, rather than have them on his.

Maybe that was only because of who he was with, because it was Sapnap.

Sometimes it was still hard for Karl to remember just how much his perspective- his *life*, had changed since he arrived. Every hour of every day seemed to teach him something new about himself.

"Σε αγαπώ." Sapnap mumbled, pulling his face away from Karl's neck so he could meet his gaze. Karl slowly lifted his head back up, instinctively leaning back down to Sapnap's lips.

To Karl's surprise, Sapnap leaned away a bit, a smile still on his face. He brought one of his hands away from Karl's back, reaching up to run his fingers through his hair instead. Karl's eyes closed in a wave of slow blinks, his head resting in Sapnap's hand.

"How are you feeling?" Sapnap asked, his voice soft and low. His voice matched the evening rain- gentle, comforting, something you could listen to all night long.

"I like this." Karl answered, nuzzling his face into Sapnap's hand. "I wish I knew sooner *how*

much I like this." He continued, opening his eyes slowly. The look on Sapnap's face resembled confusion, his thumb slowing down on Karl's cheek.

"I wish I had known sooner how much I like *you*." Karl admitted, closing his eyes as soon as he saw Sapnap's expression shift.

"You don't have to say that just because I told you I love you." Sapnap said with a slightly dry laugh. Karl opened his eyes instantly, his brows furrowing from hearing Sapnap's doubt.

"Nick, I'm telling you this because it's *true*-"

"Whoa, don't go and *Nick* me now." Sapnap deflected with another laugh. Karl shifted in his spot on Sapnap's lap, pressing himself back against his chest. This caught Sapnap's attention right away, as he turned to face Karl with wide eyes.

"You give away love like it's nothing, but when I try to give it back to you, you shut me out." Karl said slowly, his eyes flicking between Sapnap's. When Sapnap tried to look away, Karl brought his hands to the sides of Sapnap's face, stopping him.

"I..." Sapnap started, looking between Karl's eyes before closing his own. "It's hard to explain." He sighed. Karl began running his thumb across Sapnap's cheek, catching a glimpse of his darkening bruise with each pass.

"I don't care if you fumble over your words or start over a hundred times. I just care that you *try*." Karl said, bringing Sapnap's head close enough to kiss his forehead. Before he even had the chance to pull away, Sapnap wrapped both his arms tightly around his waist again, holding him in place.

"I get scared." Sapnap whispered, resting his head on Karl's shoulder. Karl relaxed into the embrace, slowly running his hands across Sapnap's back.

"What makes you scared?" Karl asked.

"That this is *real*. That we're... together." He sighed, his grip tightening, as if he were afraid Karl would disappear.

"Being my boyfriend scares you?" Karl asked, his hands pausing on Sapnap's back.

"No... It's more like thinking about if you ever decide you *don't* want me to be your boyfriend anymore- that's what scares me." Sapnap explained. Before Karl could even dispute, Sapnap continued.

"*Before*, things like kissing you, holding you like this, telling you I love you- *everything*, it was just a hypothetical. Hypotheticals don't leave you." Sapnap continued, pushing his face further into Karl's shoulder.

"Wait- do you think I'm planning on leaving you?" Karl asked. Instead of trying to pull away and make Sapnap face him, he leaned in closer, wrapping both his arms around Sapnap's shoulders.

"No... but you *can*. I'm used to my feelings for you, they're practically all I've ever known. That's why I can give you love so easily. It's just, actually *experiencing* you giving love to me is new. It's something I could lose. Sometimes it's hard to accept it when I can't even fathom how much it's going to hurt when it's gone." Sapnap sighed, squeezing Karl before loosening his grip.

"You told me I shouldn't worry about things that haven't happened." Karl said quietly, placing his hand under Sapnap's chin, turning him to look at him.

Sapnap's eyes were still puffy from crying earlier, his discolored bruise only growing deeper in color. Karl traced his thumb over Sapnap's bottom lip, grazing the small cut from where it had split.

"You love me." Karl said quietly, his eyes still fixed on Sapnap's lips.

"Yes." Sapnap confirmed. The hint of a smile grew on Karl's face when he noticed Sapnap puckering his lips slightly, kissing Karl's thumb when it passed over them again.

"You're *in* love with me." Karl's tone was almost questioning, his eyes finally meeting Sapnap's. There was an instant look of panic that washed over Sapnap's face for less than a second. Karl could tell that Sapnap must've been fighting his every instinct to look away.

"Yes." He repeated, closing his eyes before he spoke. Karl didn't mind, instead taking the opportunity to simply admire Sapnap.

He was beautiful. It didn't matter if his hair was array or if he hadn't slept in days- his appearance was something that Karl would always marvel at, never failing to find something new to appreciate.

"We're in the same book." Karl said. He moved his thumb away from Sapnap's lips, now placing two fingers between Sapnap's furrowed brows. He gently pressed against Sapnap's forehead, encouraging him to release the tension he was holding there.

"You're in love with me. I'm telling you that we're in the same book, you're just a few pages ahead. You've also had this book a lot longer than me, so it makes sense you're further along in it than I am." Karl continued the analogy. He smiled at the sight of Sapnap's green eyes opening slowly, looking up at him.

"I'm not a slow reader either." Karl said with a smile, sliding his hand down to Sapnap's shoulders.

"Before I get my hopes up, are you saying that you..." Sapnap paused, taking in a shaky breath. "You're saying you're... *on track* to fall in love with me?" He asked.

Karl swore he could practically feel Sapnap's heart beating against his own chest. The small smile on Karl's face remained as he began to nod, watching the anxiety slowly leave Sapnap's body.

"How could I not?" Karl asked rhetorically, a slight taunt in his words. A smile finally grew on Sapnap's face, a genuine laugh actually passing his lips.

"*Really?*" Sapnap asked, his eyes impossibly bright and filled with hope.

"Of *course*, you mor-"

Karl didn't even get the chance to finish his sentence, his words being interrupted by Sapnap's lips crashing into his own. The kiss broke often from their laughter, but they continued to return each time.

This was something Karl never imagined he'd experience. Not just the 'in a relationship with and falling in love with a *man*' part- but the undeniable happiness he felt. No matter how many obstacles the world seemed to throw their way, it only continued to bring them closer.

As he sat in Sapnap's lap, smiling into each kiss, Karl began thinking back on every time he wished this was how Sapnap was holding him without even realizing it. How in the past, he took any opportunity to climb on or over Sapnap. How much he craved the feeling of Sapnap wrapping his

arms around him and pulling him down.

Maybe Karl had been reading the book longer than he was even aware of.

There was no way he could possibly have *just* begun feeling this way about Sapnap, right? It was virtually impossible for him to have already developed such profound feelings over the span of a few days.

Karl just didn't know how to name his feelings before. He couldn't call those feelings love or longing or even *lust*- because those weren't words you used to describe how you feel about your friends.

But those are what he felt.

When he said he loved Sapnap, he never failed to spew out the word *platonically* as a defense mechanism. All the times he found himself longing to be in Sapnap's arms, he convinced himself it was just because physical touch was his love language.

Every time Sapnap would wrap an arm around his waist, slide a hand across his thigh, slowly pull his bottom lip between his teeth during a conversation where his eyes were glued to Karl's lips- those experiences drove Karl crazy, and he never knew why.

He never knew why until Sapnap kissed him, pulling his face slowly down to his own, and Karl found his heart racing out of his chest- not from nerves, no, but from *excitement*. He couldn't rationalize the way his brain seemed to scream '*finally*' when their lips met for the first time.

Oh, how things have changed since that first kiss. The kiss that also took place on this porch in the dead of night, with Sapnap's family sleeping peacefully inside, completely unaware of how lives were changing one room over.

But *now*, the kiss wasn't broken with tears and running away. This kiss *soothed* tears and heartache. This kiss didn't involve hands pushing Karl away by his chest, but instead hands wrapping around his torso, holding him flush against Sapnap.

Karl detached himself from Sapnap, breaking the kiss long enough to adjust how he was sitting. He was trying to get off Sapnap's lap, but the hands around his waist sternly held him in place. Before he could turn to face Sapnap, he felt lips kissing along his neck again.

"Sap- *Sap*, come on." Karl said through a laugh, beginning to slightly lean his head to the side so Sapnap could continue kissing his neck. The movement was basically subconscious, like he didn't even have to question that he wanted more.

"Why... should I... stop?" Sapnap asked between kisses, each one beginning to press a bit harder. Karl let his eyes close and allowed his head to practically rest on his own shoulder.

"*Because...*" Karl tried to answer, no words coming to mind. Karl's hand found its way to the back of Sapnap's head, entangling his fingers through tresses of unbrushed curls, practically guiding Sapnap's lips to exactly where he wanted them.

Karl didn't know the words to describe how much he enjoyed this. Sapnap's facial hair scratching against his neck contrasting with soft lips trailing across his skin. Warm but rough hands slipped under his shirt, making their way across his back like his body was something to be discovered.

"*Sap-*" Karl exclaimed through an exhale when light kisses progressed to love bites. Sapnap paused long enough to let out a laugh, which pushed warm air across Karl's skin, before he leaned back in,

picking up where he left off. Karl was already trying to recall the clothes he packed, praying he brought a turtleneck, because there was no way he had the willpower to *actually* stop him.

Everywhere Sapnap's lips touched made Karl's skin feel like it was on fire, aching to feel his lips pass over every inch of his skin again. His back arched at the weight of Sapnap's fingernails grazing with more intent.

Karl wasn't sure if the goosebumps dancing across his skin were from the mist carried in the night wind or from the moon in his arms. Either way, Karl welcomed the sensation.

He found himself tightening his grip around the bunches of curls tangled between his fingers, when Sapnap managed to read his mind, finally pulling away from his neck. Karl wasted no time in leaning down to connect their lips, realizing how much he already craved the way Sapnap tasted.

It was clear to see their carefully choreographed kisses had ventured away from the routine, each boy pushing the boundary towards new territory. This was unfamiliar, but Karl didn't feel uncomfortable in the way he usually would. All he felt was eager anticipation.

He was excited to learn more about himself. He was excited to learn more about Sapnap. He was most excited that they were learning these things about themselves *together*.

"αγάπη μου-" (Greek to English translation: My love)" Sapnap barely got out, managing to break the kiss.

"Hmm?" Karl hummed his response, already feeling himself leaning back in, like Sapnap had his own gravitational pull. When he found himself staring and bitten lips curled into a smile, Karl knew that Sapnap was undoubtedly smiling because of him- because of how increasingly obvious it was becoming that he was enjoying this.

"We can slow down. There's no-" Sapnap paused when Karl adjusted slightly, rocking his hips. "-need to rush." Sapnap finished his thought, allowing the weight of his head to be fully supported by Karl's hands, which had yet to unravel from his hair.

"I wouldn't say this is *rushing*." Karl answered, taking advantage of the opportunity before him. With Sapnap's head thrown back, he had unobstructed access to his neck.

"*Karl*." Sapnap said his name like a warning, but Karl chose to ignore him, continuing on the path he was headed. He could feel Sapnap's breath stutter the deeper he kissed against his neck.

Warm hands released their iron grip around hips, snaking their way under the familiar border of Karl's crewneck. With the way frustrated hands seemed to push against the fabric, Karl was beginning to realize maybe this was going to be Sapnap's favorite color on *and* off of him.

Karl had never seen Sapnap like this. He'd seen him flustered before- too many times to count. This was different, though. The only way he could think to describe it was how possessive Sapnap got any time Charlie came near him- even though they were alone.

It was unclear whose heart was beating faster, as slow lips over traced exposed skin and desperate hands raked up and down Karl's spine- each act screaming mine, mine, *mine*.

"Oh- Jesus Christ- go, *go*." A hushed voice at the end of the porch caught both their attention, followed by hushed laughter and fading footsteps.

Sapnap and Karl pulled away from each other in record time, as Karl took a few steps back until he bumped into the railing. Sapnap cleared his throat, standing from the swing and adjusting his

clothes, while the squeaking chains out rang the windchimes.

"Andrew?" Sapnap called out, looking towards where the voice had come from.

An audible sigh came from around the corner, the sound of shuffling footsteps that were just barely louder than the residual rain soon following.

Andrew peeked out his head from behind the corner, looking around cautiously, like he was afraid of seeing the same scene as before.

"Dude, it's almost midnight- are you seriously just getting home?" Sapnap asked, instantly deflecting the conversation away from them. Karl wasn't even sure when, but he seemed to have gravitated to stand behind Sapnap, stealing glances around the back of his head.

"Dad said I had to be *home* by 11, not *inside* by 11. I've been sitting in the driveway since 10:45." Andrew said with a shrug. Karl swore he could feel Andrew's eyes narrowing in on him. He instinctively reached out, gently holding onto the fabric of Sapnap's shirt.

"And did dad say you could have a *friend* spend the night?" Sapnap asked, nodding his head to the side. Andrew's face fell before he let out a sigh. He leaned back, looking around the corner of the porch. A face Karl had never seen before but instantly recognized appeared from around the corner.

Cameron.

He slowly made his way to Andrew's side, standing noticeably close to him, and pulled down his hood. Cameron was considerably shorter than Andrew, probably around 5'4 or 5'5. His hair was dark blond in color, short on the sides, and just a bit longer on the top.

"Hey, Andrew's brother. Hey, Andrew's brother's... *friend*." Cameron said, biting back a smile. Karl noticed that when Andrew tried to sneakily nudge Cameron, their hands seemed to disappear behind their backs.

"*Hi*, Cameron. This is Karl, he's-"

"Whoa, what happened to your face?" Andrew interrupted, walking forward towards Sapnap. Karl let go of his grasp on Sapnap's shirt, instead holding onto Sapnap's hand, before Andrew reached them.

"Take Cameron home, we'll talk when you get back." Sapnap sighed, doing his best to brush off Andrew's hand.

"What? *No*. Tell me what happened." Andrew repeated, looking over his shoulder towards Cameron, who had stayed back on the other side of the porch.

"I'll tell you *after* you take him home." Sapnap said again, squeezing Karl's hand. Karl stepped around Sapnap, standing between him and Andrew as best he could.

"Here, give me the keys and I can take Cam-"

"Why won't either of you just *talk* to me?" Andrew interrupted, taking a step back to look between them.

"Andrew?" Cameron called out from the other side of the porch. Andrew turned around, walking back to him, saying something just out of hearing range.

"He's going to freak out when I tell him, I don't want Cameron to see him like that." Sapnap whispered, looking up at Karl. Karl looked over Sapnap's face, his eyes drawn to the maroon colored splotch on his cheek like it was his first time seeing it all over again.

"You want to protect him." Karl said quietly, reaching his hand out to gently run his thumb over the bruise.

"Him *and* Cameron." Sapnap sighed, closing his eyes and leaning his face into Karl's hand. "Honestly, I'm not sure which would make my dad more furious- thinking Andrew snuck in a *girl* or figuring out *why* he had to sneak in a boy." Sapnap continued.

"I'll take him home, you talk to Andrew." Karl insisted, stepping forward to kiss Sapnap's opposite cheek before Andrew approached them again, this time with Cameron at his side.

"You told dad, didn't you?" Andrew asked, trying to keep his voice level. Karl stepped back, trailing his hand down Sapnap's arm until he intertwined their fingers.

"Andy, just-"

"*Answer me.*" Andrew cut off Sapnap, his cheeks and eyes beginning to redden. Karl squeezed Sapnap's hand, giving him a small nod when he met Karl's gaze.

"Yes." Sapnap said through a sigh, turning back to face Andrew. Karl could tell Sapnap was dreading the thought of retelling the story of tonight *again*.

"You told dad you're gay and he did *that*." Andrew's words were sharp, the pain in his voice clear.

"Yes." Sapnap repeated.

"*Fuck.*" Andrew muttered, turning around and roughly running a hand through his hair. Cameron reached out and grabbed the hand Andrew still had at his side, preventing him from walking away.

"Andy, it's not all bad." Sapnap tried to explain, stopping as soon as Andrew turned back to face him.

"Not all bad? *Not all bad?*" Andrew repeated back to Sapnap in disbelief, rushing to wipe away a tear that had yet to get the chance to fall.

"Andrew, he *apologized*, he said he didn't care if I was gay! Look, me telling him- getting *this* reaction out of him *now*- it's fine! It means he's going to have time to come to terms with it before you come out." Sapnap explained, gesturing to his cheek.

"He *hit you* and you're saying it's *fine*?" Andrew asked, wrapping his arm around Cameron when he leaned further into his side. Karl realized Cameron appeared to be mirroring what he did, seeing that every time he leaned further into Sapnap, it seemed to help calm him down. Karl was guessing Cameron hoped that Andrew would feel comforted in the same way.

"No, what he did is not fine- but *I'm* fine. I don't even care about having his approval but he gave it to me anyway. Look, I did this for *you*- to protect *you*. I don't care what happens to me, I just care that you're safe." Sapnap explained, stepping forward.

Karl watched as Sapnap reached up, running his finger over the scar that trailed through Andrew's eyebrow. The scar Karl knew their dad gave him. Cameron looked confused, but didn't seem to want to interrupt.

"I had a feeling he was going to resort to old habits after hearing his son liked boys. I just wanted to make sure *I* was the son who told him first- that *I* was the son he hurt this time." Sapnap continued, bringing his hand away from Andrew's face and rubbing his own cheek.

"You don't have to keep protecting me, I'm *stronger* now. I'm not the same scared kid on the stairs anymore." Andrew looked away, wiping the tears that stubbornly clung to his lashes.

"I know I don't *have* to, I just wanted to." Sapnap turned back to face Karl, extending his hand out to him. Karl stepped forward slowly, sliding his fingers across Sapnap's palm. "Just because you *are* strong, doesn't mean you should have to do scary things alone." Sapnap said with a smile, looking over to Karl as he repeated the same words Karl told him before dinner.

Karl smiled back at Sapnap, intertwining their fingers once again.

"It's gonna be okay." Cameron said quietly, brushing Andrew's hand away from his face, using the sleeve of his hoodie to wipe Andrew's tears instead.

"But, with all that being said-" Sapnap started with a sigh. "Cameron, you should really go home. Our dad doesn't know that you're... uh, he'd freak if he thought Andrew snuck in a *girl*. And he'd most *definitely* freak out if he found out he actually snuck in a *boy*." Sapnap explained awkwardly, using his free hand to rub the back of his neck.

"No, it's okay. I get it." Cameron said after a second of silence passed, nodding his head.

"I want you to *stay*." Andrew whispered, hanging onto Cameron's hand when he stopped leaning into his side. "Isn't there a way for you guys to, I don't know, cover for us?" Andrew turned back to Sapnap and Karl, but Karl couldn't help but feel like Andrew was only looking at him.

"Sap." Karl nudged Sapnap's side gently. Sapnap turned to face him in an instant, clearly surprised by Karl's willingness to assist them.

"Dad has the produce run for his Houston store on Mondays, he's out of the house by, like, *4am*. You'd just need to distract Jen long enough for us to-"

"*Andy*." Sapnap interrupted with a sigh, holding out his hand to request his car keys. Karl watched as Andrew held his tongue, slowly pulling his hand out of Cameron's to retrieve the key from his pocket.

"I'm going to drive you back to Cam's house and you *both* can stay the night there. If Jen asks where you are, I'll just say when you got back from the movie *alone*, you saw my face, freaked, and asked me to take you to a friend's place to stay the night. I'll take whatever heat she gives me for it." Sapnap explained.

Andrew stared blankly at Sapnap for a few seconds before the offer seemed to click in his mind. Once the moment of realization hit, he turned to Cameron.

"Would... would your parents be okay with that?" Andrew asked, nerves present in his voice.

"Yeah, they never care about that sort of thing." Cameron shrugged, giving Andrew a small smile.

"Okay, *you*- go get whatever you need to spend the night at his place." Sapnap rushed, pointing between Andrew and the door. Andrew didn't waste a second, practically sprinting to the side door on the porch. Karl tried to muffle his laugh when Andrew ran by him.

"Are you okay with riding along, μωρό μου (Greek to English translation: my baby)?" Sapnap

asked, turning around to face Karl.

Karl smiled from hearing Sapnap use the familiar Greek phrase. He had never been one for pet names, but hearing it in a different language somehow changed his perspective.

"Of course." Karl answered, pulling his hand away just before tucking a hair behind Sapnap's ear, suddenly remembering they weren't alone. It was bad enough Cameron had to see them on the swing together, they didn't need to dig a deeper hole for themselves.

"So, Cameron- uh, how was the movie?" Karl asked, creating a bit of space between him and Sapnap. Karl tried to avoid letting a laugh escape him when Sapnap seemed to be clearly bothered by the space, following him over to the porch railing immediately.

"Oh, uh, *well*." Cameron started with an awkward laugh, stepping to the other side of the porch so he could lean against the house across from them. "Turns out there weren't any movies playing- I mean, the last showing started at 7. So, we just sat in the car and talked for a while." He shrugged, looking anywhere but in their direction.

"Weird, I *specifically* remember Andrew showing me the 8:10pm showtime for Morbius." Karl said with a smirk, catching both their attention.

"Oh- *that*, well, you see-"

"I'm ready!" Andrew announced as he reentered the porch, his backpack with some clothes pouring out of it slung over his shoulder. Karl covered his mouth when he began laughing, causing Andrew to look around the group in confusion.

"Do I need to get my car detailed?" Sapnap whispered just loudly enough for Karl to overhear, nudging Andrew in arm.

"*What?*" Andrew asked, instantly looking over to Cameron. He had already pulled his hood back up, looking away from the group, which made the whole situation seem more incriminating. Karl started pulling Sapnap towards the edge of the porch, trying to give Andrew a break.

"They're 16 and it was a first date, have some faith in them." Karl whispered, looking over his shoulder at Andrew and Cameron walking a few strides behind them.

"When we were 16, I was closeted and you were the founder of your high school's *videogames club*- I don't think *we* are a very fair judge of how much faith we should put into them." Sapnap grumbled.

Karl did his best to keep his laughter to a minimum, walking hand in hand with Sapnap towards the car.

"So, are we 3 for 3?" Sapnap asked, unlocking the car and opening Karl's door for him. Karl glanced over to see Cameron and Andrew approaching as well.

"What's that mean?" Karl asked with an amused smile, lowering himself into the seat in sync with Andrew opening the backdoor for Cameron.

"3 dates in one day." Sapnap said with a smile, leaning down to Karl's level. "Taking you to my favorite spots in Texas, pillow-fort movie night, and a light night drive." Sapnap spoke quietly, his words nearly drowned out by the younger two's oblivious conversation.

"You're a moron." Karl scoffed, trying to find an angle that could hide his blush from Sapnap's

vision.

"A moron who's in love with you."

Karl turned his head around faster than he knew he was capable of, just as Sapnap reached his seatbelt around him. Sapnap pecked Karl's lips at the same time he clicked the seatbelt into place.

"It's nice when *you're* the one blush-"

"Can you guys *not* be super embarrassing when this is still technically our first date." Andrew snidely interrupted, catching both their attention. Karl was surprised when Sapnap didn't break out into his usual flushed complexion, instead leaning to look around him at the back seat with his eyes squinted.

"2013, middle of summer-"

"What are you-"

"Out by the pond at our grandparents' house-"

"*Nick! Shut up!*"

"6-year-old Andy forgot his swim trunks but *insisted* on getting in the water-"

"Nick, *seriously*, just get in the car and-"

"So to solve the problem, he put on our cousin's Barbie bathing suit and paraded through the *entire* house to show everyone just how smart he was for finding a solution. He was rather *flamboyant* back in the day." Sapnap finished with a cheeky grin.

Cameron and Karl were struggling to keep their laughter hushed, while Andrew buried his face in his hands.

"Just. *Drive*." Andrew muttered, nudging away the hand Cameron placed on his back, even though he was still laughing.

"Don't say what I'm doing is embarrassing when I know every skeleton in your closet by name." Sapnap said with a much more devious smirk, finally pulling away from Karl and closing the car door behind him.

"Think about it this way- at least when your dad says he had no idea you like guys, you can remind him of that story and say he should've put two and two together." Cameron offered with another failed attempt at concealing his laugh.

"What was it you were saying about this being our 'first and *only*' date?" Andrew grumbled, attempting to give Cameron a dirty look. Karl watched in the rearview mirror as the look quickly faded away and Andrew scooted over to sit in the middle seat, in order to be closer to Cameron.

"Alright, Cam. Lead the-" Sapnap cut himself off as soon as he sat down, reaching out to the dash in front of his speedometer.

"What?" Cameron asked from the backseat. Karl was guessing by his tone he wasn't sure if Sapnap *actually* didn't finish his sentence or if Andrew was distracting him.

"Andy's favorite color is red." Sapnap said, his tone much more earnest than the taunting one he used previously. Karl looked over as Sapnap pulled a small bouquet of red flowers out from behind

the steering wheel, tied together with a small piece of twine.

"Oh, um, I know. Uh, that's-" Cameron paused, letting out a cough, which Karl wasn't sure was real or fake. "That's why I picked those for him." He finished.

Karl gently took the slightly wilted flowers out of Sapnap's grasp, turning around to hand them to Andrew. The two sets of cheeks that nearly matched the color of the flowers were enough to bring a smile back to Karl's face.

Andrew accepted the bouquet and Cameron didn't hesitate to begin spewing out directions to Sapnap, eager to change the subject. Once he turned around, Karl looked down at the hand Sapnap slowly slid across his thigh, turning it upwards as an invitation.

As that same rough but oh so warm hand wrapped around his own, Karl found himself wondering about how different things could've been if he recognized his feelings sooner- if they had *met* sooner.

If they met when they were Andrew and Cameron's age and were able to *actually* walk through the halls of their high school, hand in hand, stealing kisses between classes. What it would have been like for Karl to wear Sapnap's jersey to his football games and cheer him on from the bleachers.

Karl's thoughts wandered to homecoming kings nominations, bus seats next to each other on field trips, passing love notes in study halls, holding hands under the table at lunch, *everything*. He knew that every memory he could think of would have been a hundred times better if Sapnap were by his side.

The more rational part of Karl's mind understood, now more than ever, that back then in *Texas*, a public relationship wouldn't have been a safe or feasible option for them.

Even so, he let himself get lost in those daydreams anyway, imagining an idealized past through rose-tinted glasses.

With star lit backroads and his boyfriend's thumb rubbing slow circles against the back of his hand, Karl got carried away in the fantasy of what it would be like to be 16 again and fortunate enough to have already met the love of his life.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was... all over the place lmao but it ended pretty sweet ig? Also, figured I'd throw in another Karl perspective chapter- haven't had one of those in a while

You are the night

Chapter Summary

Sapnap and Karl go stargazing

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Thanks... for everything." Andrew said, adjusting his backpack as he leaned down to look at Sapnap through the open window.

"It's what I'm here for." Sapnap answered with a smile, doing his best to keep the conversation light. It was already half past midnight, and although he knew that Andrew was far too old to have a 'bed-time', he was aware he had to be to school by 8am the next morning.

"You too, Karl." Andrew said with a more relaxed smile, tapping the car door once as he stood.

Sapnap looked over just in time to see Karl smile and nod in his brother's direction. He looked impossibly tired, like even calling out goodnight was too difficult of a task for him.

Andrew jogged to catch up to Cameron, both of them disappearing into his house. As soon as the front door shut and Sapnap knew they were safely inside for the night, he began backing out of Cameron's driveway.

"Wait." Karl's voice was so faint, Sapnap nearly missed it entirely.

"What?" Sapnap asked after a second, putting the car back into park. He left the interior lights off, knowing the brightness would probably bother Karl. Even in the dark, his face barely illuminated from the glow of the display, Sapnap could see the smile on Karl's face.

"*What*, you moron." Sapnap said again, a laugh embedded in his words, as he lifted his hand from Karl's lap to push a few hairs out of his face.

"I want to be three for three." Karl answered, closing his eyes as Sapnap's hand trailed more slowly through his hair.

"We are- late night drive, remember?" He rolled his eyes playfully, leaning forward to kiss the top of Karl's head. As he pulled his hand away from Karl's face, getting ready to drive again, Karl reached out and pulled his hand back.

"I want to look at the stars with you. I want *that* to be our three for three." Karl requested, his eyes doing a much better job at pleading than his words.

"Karl, it's-"

"μωρό μου." Karl interrupted, causing Sapnap to turn back and face him. "Call me μωρό μου, I like it." He continued, leaning his head against the headrest and playing with Sapnap's fingers.

Sapnap swore that if he wasn't already wrapped around Karl's finger before, he surely was now.

"μωρό μου-" Sapnap emphasized, watching the small smile on Karl's lips grow. "You're falling asleep, we can look at the stars tomorrow." Sapnap said with a light laugh, seeing that Karl's smile was almost instantly replaced with a pout.

"But the sky is finally clear and it has that after-rain smell outside." Karl squeezed Sapnap's hand, trying to persuade him.

Sapnap was able to put the car in reverse again, successfully backing out of the driveway this time. He tried turning Karl's hand in his as an attempt to intertwine their fingers, but Karl stubbornly held his hand in place.

"If you're still awake by the time we get back to my parents' house, *maybe* we can-"

"Bet." Karl interrupted, finally allowing Sapnap to intertwine their fingers.

"Oh, we're *betting* now?" Sapnap asked with a laugh, stealing glances in Karl's direction, catching glimpses of his profile in the lowlight.

"I can stay awake for- pfft, not even 30 minutes." Karl scoffed with an emphasized shrug, pointing at the ETA on the car's display.

"Whatever you say, μωρό μου." Sapnap shrugged back, taking in the sight of Karl's profile one last time before fully dedicating his attention back to the road.

Just as Sapnap expected, Karl was asleep a few minutes later, still holding Sapnap's hand in both his own. He didn't mind that Karl had fallen asleep, it actually made him happy in a way.

Ever since the first time they met in person, Karl was *always* falling asleep around him. Sapnap found it a bit strange at first- he actually debated on asking Karl if he had narcolepsy or something. It wasn't until they were on the set of Mr. Beast's 'Extreme \$100,000 Game of Tag!' video that Sapnap finally got a better understanding of Karl's unusual sleeping patterns.

All the competitors were waiting around the set, talking amongst themselves before the game began. Sapnap had planned on doing some networking during the free time- trying to make connections with the other creators in Mr. Beast's team, but Karl seemed to have a different plan for them.

As soon as Jimmy came by saying it was going to be an hour or so before they started recording, Karl decided he was going to take the opportunity to sleep while he could, seeing that no one ever really knew how long these videos could go on for.

Like every other time Karl had randomly fallen asleep since he arrived, Sapnap found himself being a human pillow, with Karl fully wrapped around his torso, his head pressed against his chest. Sapnap would be kidding himself if he said he'd rather be talking to others than experiencing this.

The first couple times Karl fell asleep on him, Sapnap remembered being so tense that he was praying Karl couldn't tell how nervous he was. When Karl taking naps on him turned into a multiple times a day situation- Sapnap quickly became more comfortable with him.

Sapnap had one arm wrapped around Karl's shoulders, aimlessly drawing small shapes onto Karl's arm with his pointer finger. He knew Karl loved that- the light tickle of someone gently running their fingers across his arms or back. He had his phone in his other hand, scrolling through Twitter to pass the time.

"There's Karl! Chandler's been looking-" Chris started, cutting himself off when Sapnap looked up from his phone and he realized Karl was sleeping.

Sapnap was more disappointed than he expected to be, seeing that he knew he and Karl wouldn't have much more time alone for the rest of the day once the challenge started.

"Chandler's looking for him? Here, I can wake-"

"No!" Chris quickly interrupted in a rough whisper, holding out his hands. Sapnap froze, slowly lowering his hand back to his side. He watched the tension melt away from Chris's face when Karl stopped adjusting, seeming to be sound asleep again.

"Sorry." Chris whispered with a laugh, finally noticing the confused expression on Sapnap's face. "It's just- Karl never sleeps. He's always helping Jimmy or the editing team or- well, you know how he is." Chris continued, a smile growing on his face as he spoke.

"What do-" Sapnap paused, lowering his voice to a whisper when Chris gave him another panicked look. "What do you mean he never sleeps?" He finished his question.

"I mean he never sleeps- literally. I've never seen him nap on set before. Hell, I've hardly seen him sleep at his own house before. He always cracks open another monster instead of sleeping, no matter how tired he is." Chris chuckled under his breath and so did Sapnap. In the week and some odd days Sapnap had been staying with Karl, he quickly realized Karl drank monster like it was water.

"I, uh, I didn't realize." Sapnap lowered his voice a bit more, hoping the brim of his hat hid his flushed complexion. "He's been taking naps any chance he can since I got here, I didn't realize that wasn't his usual?" Sapnap shrugged gently, actively trying to not disturb Karl.

"Yeah, this couldn't be further from how he normally is- but this is great, so, whatever you're doing- keep doing it." Chris said with a wave, stepping back out into the main room. Sapnap looked over at Karl, barely able to see his face beyond his overgrown hair.

Karl had a hard time letting himself rest, but somehow, when he was with Sapnap, he was able to sleep. Sapnap reached over to gently flick a few hairs out of Karl's face, giving him a better view. He only had a couple more days left with Karl, so he already knew he wanted to make sure Karl caught up on as much sleep as possible.

This became a pattern every time Sapnap visited him. It was like Karl was conditioned to become sleepy as soon as his eyes landed on Sapnap. He never minded, in fact, it was quite the opposite.

Sapnap loved the free pass napping gave him to hold Karl to his chest, to take in all the stray mumbles and cute noises Karl made in his sleep, to know that he was Karl's personal recharge station. Something as simple as napping had made Sapnap feel like the most special person in the world.

"μωρό μου, we're back." Sapnap whispered, leaning over to kiss the top of Karl's head and undo his seat belt. He wasn't surprised when Karl grumbled something under his breath, reaching out for Sapnap's arm to link onto.

Sapnap pulled away instead, grabbing a stray hoodie from his back seat, and holding it out to Karl. Sapnap reached over one last time, brushing Karl's hair behind his ear, as he watched him nuzzle his face into the sweatshirt.

"I'll be right back." Sapnap whispered, opening his door as quietly as possible, stepping out of the

car.

He didn't close his door tightly, afraid the sound would wake Karl. Once the interior lights had faded to black and Sapnap saw that Karl was back to being sound asleep, he headed inside.

The house was silent, as to be expected for 1am on a Monday. He sifted through the linen closet, grabbing a bedsheet and a spare comforter. On his way back towards the front door, he caught sight of Jen's bird-watching binoculars. Sapnap grabbed them as well, figuring it would be a cool way to point out the satellites to Karl.

Sapnap stepped back outside, closing the front door behind him. Now that the rain had passed, the night was filled with sounds of crickets chirping, the wind chimes ringing, and the familiar squeak of the porch swing swaying in the breeze.

Karl was definitely right about the post-rain scent, the way everything held onto that unique, earthy smell. It was something that Sapnap loved about April- the frequent showers that always promised the unmistakable perfume of petrichor.

The damp grass clung to Sapnap's sweatpants, as he made his way to the middle of the field in front of his house. Lightning bugs twinkled around him, as he weaved his way through the overgrown grass. The bluebonnets looked nearly silver in the modest amount of light the moon offered.

Once he found a spot where the grass was a bit dryer, Sapnap laid out the bedsheet and tossed the folded comforter in the middle. He was more gentle with the binoculars, leaning over to set them down on the sheet.

It only took him a minute to get back to the car, a smile growing on his face when he saw Karl still asleep inside. He made his way to Karl's door, opening it slowly.

"What was it you were *betting*?" Sapnap teased, tugging lightly on the sweatshirt Karl was hugging.

Karl woke up with a yawn, blinking his eyes slowly. Sapnap adored everything about Karl, but half-asleep Karl was especially lovable. His hair was array, his face wore a perpetually confused pout, and he *always* reached out for Sapnap once he saw him- tonight being no exception to that.

"Come here." Sapnap said with a laugh under his breath, wrapping his arms around Karl's waist when he reached out for his shoulders. Karl put in very little effort to help Sapnap pull him to his feet, seeming to already be falling back asleep from just leaning against him.

"I thought you wanted to look at the stars together." Sapnap whispered, closing Karl's door with one hand before returning his arm to its place around Karl's waist.

"You said no." Karl whined, pushing his face against the side of Sapnap's neck. Whether it was intentional or not, Sapnap found himself swaying the two of them back and forth slowly, almost as though he were rocking Karl to sleep.

"You know I can't *actually* say no to you." Sapnap mumbled with a laugh, hoping Karl was tired enough to forget what he said come morning. A warm breath rushed across Sapnap's neck with each exhale of Karl's laugh.

"I set something up for us, come on." Sapnap said, trying to push them away from their place of being leaned against the car. Karl instantly refuted, letting out a series of quiet groans, and practically putting his full body weight on Sapnap.

"Alright, μωπό, let's go." He said with a laugh, leaning forward to grab onto the back of Karl's thighs, lifting him against his chest.

"μωπό..." Karl repeated after a moment. "Isn't that, just, *baby*?" He asked, seeming to wake up a bit more. Sapnap adjusted his grip as Karl leaned back, looking up at him with a smile.

"Yeah, I'm surprised you figured that out." Sapnap said with a laugh. They were nearly to the small set up he put together, the sounds of the crickets becoming more clear.

"You're supposed to say μωπό μου- you said that just μωπό was for actual babies." Karl furrowed his brows in a way that made Sapnap smile wider. He always had this lost puppy look when he was confused.

"I know what I said. You're acting like a baby, so I'm calling you a *baby*." Sapnap shook his head, laughing at the look of realization on Karl's face, immediately followed by Karl squirming in his arms.

"Easy- *easy*." Sapnap laughed, holding Karl closer and slowing his pace. "The grass is wet, we're almost there." Hearing this seemed to make Karl stop being difficult, no longer trying to walk on his own.

"I'm not a baby." Karl muttered, his feet finally touching the ground when they arrived at their spot. Sapnap shook his head, biting his tongue to avoid digging himself into a hole. Karl was probably the biggest baby he knew, but he would keep that information to himself for now.

"Lay down, λουλούδι μου." Sapnap said quietly, his voice blending in with the buzz of nightlife surrounding them.

"I swear if you called me another-"

"My flower, I called you my flower." Sapnap clarified with a laugh.

"Oh. That's fine then." Karl rushed after taking a second to process the pet name, finally following Sapnap's advice and taking a seat. He almost instantly took to the comforter, unfolding it and wrapping it around himself. The air was somewhat warmer now that the rain had passed, but the residual moisture did cool the night down a bit.

Sapnap glanced up to the sky before joining Karl on the sheet he had laid out, a smile growing on his face again when Karl scooted closer to him, wrapping him in the blanket as well.

"I grabbed these too- I thought you might think it'd be cool to see the satellites." Sapnap shrugged, reaching forward to grab the binoculars. Karl accepted them, the familiar confused expression returning, as he rotated them around in his hands a few times.

Sapnap couldn't help but reach out, holding Karl's face in his hand. His cheek was cool to the touch, his freshly shaved skin feeling smooth against the palm of his hand. Sapnap could hardly see any of the blue in Karl's eyes due to the dark, making his pupils take up almost his entire iris.

"You can see *satellites* out here?" Karl asked, as though he had been waiting for Sapnap to realize he misspoke.

"Yes, satellites. There's virtually no light pollution out here, so the sky is crystal clear when it isn't cloudy. Look- you can even see the Milky Way." Sapnap smiled, using the hand he had on Karl's cheek to turn his face upwards.

"What? Where is it?" Karl asked, beginning to look around frantically, like it would disappear any second. Sapnap stifled his laugh, trying his best to stay in Karl's good graces.

"Here, follow my finger. It's not like a constellation where the stars are all bright. The Milky Way kind of looks like a cloud if you're not paying attention." Sapnap explained, sliding over on the blanket so he and Karl were pressed together, side to side.

He leaned his head on Karl's shoulder, trying to align their perspectives. Sapnap lifted Karl's hand into the air, using his pointer finger to trace the outline of the Milky Way.

"Wait- that *whole* thing?" Karl asked, pulling his hand away and squinting. Sapnap tapped the binoculars Karl was still hanging onto, reminding him to use them. Karl instantly pulled them to his eyes, fiddling with their settings.

Sapnap slid away, leaving only a sliver of space between them. He wanted to be able to admire the look on Karl's face- the familiar confused puppy look, the way he always seemed to have his mouth slightly open when he squinted his eyes, how he lifted his head an inch off the blanket as if it would improve his vision.

"The Milky Way is our galaxy, of course it's going to be big." Sapnap answered sarcastically, tracing his hand up and down Karl's forearm. He watched a smile grow on Karl's face from his touch. The smile almost seemed subconscious, like he wasn't even aware of how much he enjoyed the feeling.

After asking a few more questions about the Milky Way, Karl began pointing out a few of the constellations he recognized- the big and small dippers, Orion's belt, etc. Karl was especially proud when he was able to point out the cancer zodiac sign constellation. Even with all the stars Karl was trying to show him, Sapnap hadn't looked back to the sky once.

Why would he look at stars that were millions of light years away when he had a much better view of his own personal star, right here, laying by his side.

"We're supposed to be stargazing, not *gawking*." Karl teased, catching on that Sapnap wasn't the least bit interested in looking at the constellations.

"Are you fishing for compliments? Do you want me to tell you about how you're more beautiful than the stars?" Sapnap asked with a laugh, propping himself up on his elbow for a better view of Karl.

"Okay, *whatever*-"

"No, I will!" Sapnap interrupted with another laugh, tugging on Karl's arm when he tried to roll away, making him lay on his back again.

"A person can't be more beautiful than the stars, you moron." Karl tried to dismiss Sapnap. With the glow from the full moon, Sapnap swore he could see the apples of Karl's cheeks grow a bit warmer in color.

"You are- hey, I mean it!" Sapnap said, gently turning Karl's face back towards him after he scoffed and looked away.

"Stars don't have blue eyes that look like diamonds when the sun hits them just right. Stars don't have a contagious laugh that brightens my day *every* day. Stars don't hold me when I'm a wreck and tell me how loved I am." Sapnap smiled, fully aware of the way his tone became more gentle with each comparison he made.

"Okay, I get it." Karl said quietly, still looking up at Sapnap.

"I don't think you do. Stars may be beautiful, but nothing compares to the way you shine when you talk about something you love. The way your eyes light up and you capture the attention of everyone around you. How you can't even get through your story because you start laughing at yourself midway through." Sapnap continued, as he began to rub his thumb along Karl's heated cheek.

Karl had reached up, holding onto Sapnap's wrist as he continued to graze along his cheek. There was something magical about this moment to Sapnap- the full moon reflected in Karl's eyes, the dewdrops on the bluebonnets surrounding them, fireflies intermittently providing a golden flash.

"I'm not in love with the stars." He said under his breath, watching as his thumb seemed to have a mind of its own, reaching over to run over Karl's bottom lip.

"Sap." Karl whispered, his voice being drowned out by the crickets chirping around them, only the movement of his lips gave any indication he was saying Sapnap's name.

"That's why you're more beautiful than the stars." Sapnap finished, leaning down to kiss Karl's lips.

The kiss was gentle, light, softer than any kiss they had shared before. A sweet kiss where lips barely touch. Something simple to portray the most complex feelings Sapnap had ever known.

Sapnap pulled away not a minute later, his thumb resuming the pattern of rhythmic strokes against Karl's cheek. He loved the way Karl's eyes stayed closed for a moment longer than his, how he tilted his chin up to chase Sapnap's lips, like he was hoping Sapnap would kiss him again.

"I think I've been reading the book for longer than I thought." Karl said through an exhale, opening his eyes slowly.

"What?" Sapnap asked with furrowed brows before he remembered the analogy Karl had used earlier, comparing falling in love to reading a book.

"How else am I supposed to explain why I feel like this?" Karl asked, his expression softening and the corners of his mouth curving up into a smile.

"How is it that you feel?" Sapnap asked, lowering himself back onto the sheet, laying on his back with his face turned towards Karl. He watched as Karl remained looking at the stars, his profile practically just a silhouette in the night.

"Like I can't tell if I'm *falling* in love with you or if I just *am* in love with you." Karl answered. Sapnap watched as Karl's eyelashes batted a few more times at the sky before he turned to face him.

"Karl." Sapnap breathed his name, his heart rate spiking. He couldn't believe his ears, fully convinced that he must've fallen asleep and was living out another lucid dream.

"I think I've been lying to myself for a long time. I think I've *felt* this way for a long time." Karl continued, rolling onto his side, so he and Sapnap were laying face to face.

"Don't mess with me." Sapnap responded, practically as a defense mechanism. The part of him that feared accepting Karl's love was still inside of him, and Sapnap wasn't sure if hearing Karl's confession made it grow or shrink.

"I've told you before that I'd never mess with your feelings, Nick."

"Don't-"

"And, *yes*, I'm going to *Nick* you." Karl finished with a smile, leaning in to kiss Sapnap before he could argue any further.

This kiss took Sapnap back to the second kiss they ever shared, the one where they were lying in his bed, everything feeling up in the air. Both were kisses that seemed to make time stand still, like each of them would be transformed into new people by the time it ended.

With the scent of recent rain in the air and the symphony of crickets and wind chimes in the distance, Sapnap and Karl held each other in a way neither thought would happen in this lifetime. There was only one thought going through Sapnap's mind, with each synchronized movement of their lips.

He loves me. He loves me. He loves me.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, a chapter that was entirely fluff.... nothing suspicious about that.... definitely doesn't make you wonder if anything bad is-

The darkness you fight is within you

Chapter Summary

Sapnap's dad has a change of heart and it isn't for the better

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hours escaped them as conversations about stars and constellations turned into tracing the faint freckles scattered over the bridge of Karl's nose and kissing the mole on Sapnap's neck. The moon made its way across the sky, while mumbled words of affection turned into slow and lazy kisses, until they were too tired to even do that much.

Sapnap didn't even realize when Karl's hand stopped tracing his fingers up and down the length of his back, as they both fell asleep in each other's arms. The night sky barely held onto any darkness by the time they were soundly asleep.

Dreams of fragrant flowers and entire galaxies reflected in Karl's eyes were the last mental images Sapnap held onto, when the world rudely woke him too soon.

A blinding sun beamed directly on Sapnap's face, his body already fighting being woken up. The universe seemed to listen to his unspoken request. Sapnap stopped stirring in his makeshift bed, pulling Karl back to his chest, when a large shadow blocked the sun.

"Son."

Sapnap furrowed his brows, wondering if his sweet dreams about Karl had been replaced with-

"Jesus christ, can't believe they're doing this *crap* in my front lawn."

He opened his eyes slowly, realizing the muttering voice he heard wasn't a dream and the universe didn't put the sun behind a cloud just for him. That was *actually* his dad speaking and he was standing in the sun's path.

"Dad?" Sapnap questioned, his voice cracking when he spoke for the first time. Even after acknowledging his dad, he didn't get a response.

Sapnap pulled away from Karl, assessing his surroundings. He completely forgot that he and Karl failed to make it back inside last night. They had fallen asleep in the middle of the front yard, cuddled together, with nothing but each other and a shared blanket to keep them warm.

His eyes finally landed back on his father, dragging their way up from his feet to his face.

To the *look* on his face.

The muscles around Sapnap's lungs felt like they had hardened into stone the second he registered how his father was looking at him. The look took him back to every time his father saw him and Karl even just *standing* too close to each other.

It took him back to anytime a gay couple was mentioned on TV or someone in public had dared to look or act in a way his dad didn't approve of.

That was the whole point of the look- it wordlessly told whoever saw it that he disapproved of their very existence.

"You two need to get inside. Jen was worried when she woke up to half the house missing." His dad said, stepping away and allowing the sun to beam directly onto Sapnap's face again. Karl began to stir next to him and his dad paused, his gaze- that *look* now being directed at Karl.

Seeing, up close and personal, his dad look at the love of his life with such disdain, such disappointment, such *disgust*- it made something inside him snap.

"*Hey*." Sapnap said, his voice coming out as a husky warning. His dad's eyes flicked back to him before a look of knowing spread across his face. It wasn't like the one Sapnap saw last night, where the knowing was accompanied by regret and sorrow. His dad just looked... *annoyed*.

"Don't *hey* me, son." His dad answered, turning back around. Karl seemed to be awake at this point, beginning to push himself into a sitting position, but Sapnap's mind was completely focused on his dad now.

"So that's how it is? How you *really* feel?" Sapnap asked, standing up and walking away, dismissing the hand Karl reached out to him. He hated disregarding Karl, but he wasn't going to let his dad get away with this. Not after last night. Not after *everything*.

"I don't know why you've got such a tone with me." His dad said over his shoulder, continuing to walk away, despite knowing that Sapnap was following after him.

"Oh, I've got it. You're not *changed*. You're not *supportive*. You're a cowardice piece of shit who was afraid the *one* good thing in his life would walk away once she saw his true colors. That speech you gave me last night about accepting me- that wasn't for me. That was for Jen. You *knew* she was in the kitchen listening to us." Sapnap spat everything he had at his dad, pausing a few feet behind him when he halted his pace.

"I can say that's not true but you seem to have already decided what you want to believe." His dad answered indifferently, turning around. There was a shadow of the look still on his face, like his eyes carried a different light when he was looking at him now.

Sapnap let out a dry laugh, finding the whole situation to almost be comical. His dad got him good, that's for sure. Here Sapnap was, *genuinely* believing that his dad accepted him for who he is. He believed it so deeply it hurt.

And it all turned out to be another big disappointment.

"Yeah, I believe the facts. The *fact* is, Jen is nowhere in sight and now you're back to the same homophobic, small minded, fucking *pathetic* excuse of a father that I've known my whole life." Sapnap continued to throw everything he had in him at his dad, praying something would stick.

"*You* don't talk to me like that. I'm your father, I get your respect. I never claimed to be some *perfect* parent. Clearly I'm not, I mean, just look at how you turned out." His dad answered, holding his ground.

"You really think you deserve to call yourself my father after all this? You lost any ounce of respect I had for you when your hand hit my face- or did you forget that?" Sapnap asked, stepping forward and pointing to his cheek. His dad looked away, refusing to acknowledge the bruise.

“Oh, that’s right. We *ignore* things here. If we *ignore* them, they’ll definitely go away- like how you ignored that you *knew* I wasn’t straight.” Sapnap’s gaze hardened when his dad scoffed, maybe even the shadow of a smile on his face.

“Is that how you managed to make mom leave us? Did you just *ignore* her until she couldn’t stand it anymore?” Sapnap narrowed his eyes, treading dangerous waters, when he chose to step forward.

“You’ve crossed the line, Nicolas. Watch your mouth or get off my property.” He said, not allowing for even a moment of silence between them.

“Jen doesn’t-”

“Think twice before you open that mouth again.” His dad interrupted, closing the distance, also stepping towards Sapnap.

“Oh, I’ve thought about this a lot more than *twice*.” Sapnap continued. He couldn’t even be bothered by the hand his dad had reached out, holding onto the scruff of his shirt collar, like a high school bully in some cliché movie.

This actually felt like a movie, like a dream, like there was no way he actually just said all those things to his dad’s face.

“Jen doesn’t deserve to be trapped in a marriage with a washed up alcoholic like *you*.” Sapnap said, looking his dad straight in the eyes, keeping his voice shockingly low and level.

In the blink of an eye, Sapnap found himself laying back in the grass, the sun beaming on his face, almost as if it all was a dream and he was waking up for real this time. The reality set in when the sound of frantic footsteps in the distance began getting louder and his dad stood looming over him, spitting on the ground right next to Sapnap’s head.

“You’re right about one thing- I’m not your father anymore. I could never call myself the father of a fa-”

“We’re leaving- *now*.” Karl interrupted, pulling on Sapnap’s arm. “*Right now*.” Karl said again with more urgency than before, tugging Sapnap to stand.

Sapnap couldn’t bring himself to pry his eyes away from his dad’s, even as Karl practically dragged him across the field and towards the house.

His adrenaline was still getting the better of him. He wanted to walk back, he wanted to continue the fight, he wanted to push him to his breaking point.

The only thing that managed to break Sapnap’s stare was the sound of sniffing next to him. He turned forward, no longer fighting Karl’s pull. As soon as he caught up to him, he saw the tears streaming down his face.

“Karl, I-”

“*Don’t*.” Karl interrupted, not slowing his pace in the slightest. They were nearly back to the house. “Don’t say anything until we’re packed, in your car, and off the property. *Fuck*, even then- still *don’t*.” Karl continued, his voice wavering, as he wiped away his tears with the hand that wasn’t clutching Sapnap’s wrist.

Sapnap felt like he was in a borderline out of body experience, following Karl mindlessly through the house, not daring to utter a word.

He hurt Karl.

Not his dad- *him*.

All Karl wanted was peace, was for Sapnap to leave Texas with a better mindset than when he arrived. He only wanted what was best for him, yet Sapnap had gone and thrown caution to the wind.

Was he self-sabotaging? Did he need to push his dad like that so he would recant the acceptance Sapnap claimed to never want? Was he so afraid of letting himself be happy with Karl that he needed to ruin things before they went too far?

“Karl?” Sapnap said, his voice cracking slightly, as he took in his surroundings.

They were back in his bedroom. He had stayed back by the door while Karl was frantically throwing their clothes into suitcases, not paying any mind to whose were whose. Karl wiped a tear from his face before glancing at Sapnap momentarily.

“Go get your stuff out of the bathroom.” Karl said, ignoring the hurt tone in Sapnap’s voice. He didn’t look at Sapnap for a second longer, diving back into the task of picking up clothes off the floor.

“*Karl*.” Sapnap said again, it coming out more like a plea this time, his stance unmoved.

Karl grabbed tightly onto the sides of the suitcase he had laid on Sapnap’s bed, using it as means of support. His head was held low, his shoulders hunched over. Sapnap didn’t get the chance to take more than two steps in Karl’s direction before he froze. Karl look up at him with tears streaming down his face and something in his eyes that Sapnap had never seen directed at him.

Karl was *livid*.

“Why, Nick? *Why?*” Karl asked, tossing the shirt in his hands to the floor.

“Don’t-”

“Don’t tell me to not call you Nick, because I’m calling you *Nick*. I am *furious* right now.” Karl interrupted, pointing a finger at Sapnap. “Tell me why I woke up from a perfect night to you completely berating your dad? Can you at least tell me you didn’t start it? Tell me you weren’t *looking* for a fight with him.” Karl was borderline begging at this point, not bothering to wipe away the tears that continued to glide down his cheeks.

“I- I don’t know.” Sapnap stuttered. The small spark in Karl’s eyes looked like it fizzled out as soon as the words left Sapnap’s mouth. Silence fell over them, the only sound in the room was Sapnap’s heartbeat pounding in his chest.

“Go get your things from the bathroom.” Karl broke the silence, his voice dangerously level.

“Karl, listen-”

“No, I’m not going to listen. I’m not going to stand here and listen when-” Karl cut himself off with a sigh, rubbing his hands on his face. “Please, just, *go*... get your things.” Karl finished, turning to face away from Sapnap.

It broke Sapnap’s heart to see the way Karl was trying so desperately to remain stoic, to not completely fall apart. He wanted Karl to know he could always be vulnerable around him, that

Sapnap would always be there to hold him up. It was clear that he seemed to have lost a piece of Karl's trust.

"Okay, I'll go. I'm going." Sapnap said quietly, his eyes remained glued to Karl's back as he made his way to the bathroom.

As soon as he turned the door handle, Karl looked like he could breathe again. He quickly resumed his task of grabbing clothes off the floor and throwing them into the open suitcase.

"I love you, Karl." Sapnap said quietly, still only standing halfway through the bathroom door. Karl hesitated, freezing for a second before he finished tossing the pants he was holding into the suitcase.

"I... know." Karl answered just as quietly, turning to face completely away from Sapnap again. As much as it hurt Sapnap to walk away, he knew it was what Karl wanted. He entered the bathroom fully, closing the door behind him.

The image staring back at him in the mirror was practically a jump scare. His lip and cheek looked about as bad as he was expecting, his eyes were bloodshot and still a bit swollen, and pale skin seemed to have gotten a bit burned from sleeping under the sun.

As much as Sapnap understood that Karl wanted him out of the room so he could have some space, he also knew that Karl truly did want to leave as soon as possible, so he couldn't wallow in self pity for too long.

Sapnap made his way around the bathroom, trying his best to grab everything. Sapnap's hand froze halfway reaching for a bottle of shampoo, when the sound of heavy footsteps came into earshot.

His hand trembled when the echo of knocking sounded on his bedroom door. He knew it was his dad- not a doubt in his mind that he was the one waiting outside his room. He had committed to memory how everyone's footsteps sounded, even after years of not living at home.

It took a moment too long for Sapnap to realize that Karl didn't have the same knowledge as him, when he heard his bedroom door squeak open. Karl must've thought it was Jen coming to see what all the commotion was about.

Sapnap burst through the bathroom door, his eyes landing on Karl holding his bedroom door half open and his dad's face peeking out from behind him.

"We're leaving." Sapnap said, doing his best not to speak to his dad through gritted teeth. He didn't care how disapproving his father's gaze was, it was just that slightly hesitant look of disappointment in Karl's gaze that shattered his heart. Sapnap knew he had to be on his best behavior for whatever this conversation would entail.

"You don't need to do that, son. We both said some things we didn't mean. Let's talk this out like men." His dad said, pushing the door open on his own, causing Karl to drop his arm.

Sapnap flicked his eyes over to Karl, analyzing his every move. It was clear he was uncomfortable, but Sapnap refused to do anything without knowing for certain that Karl would agree with his actions.

"Maybe I can call you once I get home, but for now, we *are* leaving." Sapnap said, his eyes still looking between Karl and his dad.

"Come on, now. *This* is home, not that frat house in Florida you're living in." His dad said, the

smile on his face nothing less than condescending.

“We’ll say bye to Jen before we leave and we can swing by the school to let Andrew-”

“Karl, you seem like a sensible kid. Can you tell him that-”

“Hey- you’re talking to me, not him.” Sapnap cut off his dad’s interruption, gaining both their attention. Karl’s brows had tensed together, but the look of apprehension didn’t seem to be directed at him anymore.

“I’m *talking* to whoever is going to make the right decision here.” His dad said to Sapnap before facing Karl again. The second his dad lifted his hand, looking like he was reaching out to grab Karl’s shoulder, any ability Sapnap had to hold himself back disappeared.

“Touch him and I’ll kill you.” Sapnap said with such urgency, it caused his dad’s hand to freeze suspended in the air.

“You and that *damn* mouth.” His dad muttered under his breath and rolled his eyes, but pulled his hand away from Karl nonetheless. Karl took a step away from Sapnap's dad, inching his way over to Sapnap.

“Yeah, wonder who I got that from.” Sapnap said sarcastically.

“Okay, maybe we should all just-”

“We should all do what? Hmm? Should we sit down and talk about our feelings? Maybe paint our nails and braid our hair after?” Sapnap’s dad interrupted, giving Karl a dirty look before focusing on Sapnap again.

“Excuse me?” Karl asked, leaning to the side so he was in Sapnap's dad's line of view.

“Oh, don’t play dumb with me boy. I’ve seen how you act in videos, making a fool of yourself with the way you prance around like-”

“Hey!” Sapnap interrupted, stepping forward to place himself between the two of them. As soon as he was closer to his dad, everything made sense. Sapnap let out a dry laugh, like he couldn’t believe he didn’t realize it sooner.

“You’re fucking *drunk*.” Sapnap shook his head, reaching out for Karl’s hand behind his back. He felt relieved for the first time all morning when Karl reached forward and clung onto him, but the feeling was fleeting. Sapnap could feel Karl shaking.

Instead of answering, his dad scoffed, putting his hands on his hips and taking a step back. He looked around the room, like he was wondering where it all went wrong.

“I think a little scotch is deserved at a time like this. It’s not every day you find out you raised a fag.” His dad let out another laugh under his breath, flicking over some of the trinkets Sapnap had scattered over his computer desk.

Sapnap and Karl were turning in what felt like slow motion, tracking his dad as he made his way around the perimeter of the room.

“Do you have everything-”

“No need to whisper. I’m drunk, not deaf, I can still hear you.” Sapnap’s dad interrupted, cutting

Sapnap off mid sentence.

“Take the bag downstairs, I’ll grab the rest and meet you in the car.” Sapnap said at a regular volume, keeping his eyes locked with his dad. His dad looked displeased, like he was expecting Sapnap to back down after being called out.

“I’m scared.” Karl whispered, despite knowing his dad would overhear it regardless. The hand he had held in Sapnap’s squeezed tighter when Sapnap’s dad laughed.

“Are you sure you’re gay? Because I’m starting to think there’s no way he’s got anything in his pants.” Sapnap’s dad said, shaking his head, and pointing a finger at Karl. As much as it infuriated him, Sapnap turned away from his dad, facing Karl instead.

“Don’t be scared, μωπό μου. I’ll be down in a minute.” Sapnap said gently, using the opposite tone he had with his father. He hated to put Karl in the middle of this, to weaponize their relationship as fuel to the fire, but Sapnap couldn’t help but lean forward, kissing Karl’s lips.

He wasn’t surprised when Karl pulled back and his dad let out an audible scoff behind him. Even so, Sapnap brought a hand up to Karl’s cheek before he pulled away, ushering Karl towards the suitcase.

Karl quickly shut the suitcase, grabbing one other halfway packed bag before leaving the room, ignoring the eyerolls and annoyed sighs from Sapnap’s dad.

“If you have something you want to say, say it now. Because when I’m gone, I’m *gone*.” Sapnap said as soon as his bedroom door was shut.

“No, you go ahead and run away again. No need to wonder where you get *that* from.” His dad muttered at the end, going back to knocking over the few scattered items Sapnap had on his desk and shelves.

“What happened to talking this out like men?” Sapnap asked, walking passed his dad and back into the bathroom. He figured if his dad was going to waste his time, he may as well finish gathering their things.

“There aren’t any other men here with me.” His dad answered, following Sapnap towards the bathroom. Sapnap ignored the way his dad leaned against the door frame, watching his every move with a twisted look on his face.

“Well, if that’s it, then-” Sapnap paused, turning to leave the bathroom, being stopped by his dad standing in his path. “Can you m-”

“Was it me? Was there something I did that made you like this?” His dad asked, shaking his head. The way he was looking at Sapnap made him feel like he wasn’t looking at him like a person but at him like a mistake.

“No. Everything that I am is in *spite* of you.” Sapnap answered, no longer monitoring his tone since Karl was out of the room.

“Can you drop the ego for a minute?” His dad asked, a surprising amount of genuineness in his voice.

“I don’t have anything left to say to you.” Sapnap answered after a second, still trying to collect himself.

“What happened to the kid who always had a schoolyard crush on the pretty girl in his class? The kid who loved to roughhouse with his brothers? Where’s the kid I knew?” His dad asked, holding his ground in the doorway, preventing Sapnap from leaving.

“You killed him.” Sapnap answered, keeping his voice level and his eye contact unbroken.

“I’m being serious.” His dad said with a sigh after taking a few seconds to process Sapnap’s short response.

“So am I. The happy kid who you remember was a mask I wore to keep me and my brothers safe. The kid you remember and who I *actually* am have never been the same person. And that’s on *you* for never noticing.” Sapnap answered, brushing his shoulder against his dad’s, leaving the bathroom by force.

“Nick-” His dad called out. Sapnap paused, pretending his hesitancy was to gather more of his and Karl’s belongings and not because he was waiting for his dad. “Am I ever going to get the chance to know the real you?” He asked.

Sapnap could feel his heart cracking and the heat in his face growing. When it came to how his father made him feel, he could never differentiate between sadness and anger, seeing that they were usually comorbid with each other.

“I doubt it.” Sapnap answered, brushing away the tear that rolled down his cheek. He finished grabbing the last few items that were scattered across his bed, heading towards his door.

“Dad.” Sapnap spoke, his hand turning to stone around the door handle. “Be better for them. There might not be a chance for us to salvage *this*, but there is with Andrew and Ben. Don’t drive them away too.” Sapnap finished, opening his bedroom door and leaving without waiting for his dad’s response.

He made his way down the stairs, struggling to keep putting one foot in front of the other. He felt sick to his stomach, like he was going to puke at any moment. There was a certain level of finality to their conversation that he’d never experienced before.

Sapnap emerged from the small staircase that led to his room, walking out onto the main hall of the second floor. When he turned the corner, he nearly ran into Jen, who was heading for his room.

“Oh, oh my.” She said, her voice shaking a bit, looking at the bags in Sapnap’s arms.

“He’s-”

“Been drinking. Karl told me.” She said with more pain in her voice than anything his dad said during their conversation.

“It’s his choice to drink and his choice alone.” Sapnap said, offering her the same peace of mind that she gave to him the night prior. Even with her eyes looking heartbroken, she still managed to muster up a smile for him.

“That’s right.” She said, looking over Sapnap’s shoulder towards the stairwell. “Did he…” She trailed off, looking at Sapnap’s cheek before his eyes.

Sapnap sighed, adjusting the bags in his arms. He thought back to when he first woke up, the way his dad grabbed his collar, how he shoved him to the ground and spat next to his face, how there was no telling what he would’ve done next had Karl not stepped in.

“Nothing I couldn’t handle.” Sapnap answered, trying to offer her the same smile, despite his matching crestfallen expression.

“You’re too strong for your own good.” She said with a quiver in her bottom lip, resting a hand on his cheek.

“I’ll come see you more often. You, Mari, Andy, and Ben.” Sapnap said with a nod, closing his eyes and leaning his face against her hand.

“You don’t have-”

“I promise.” Sapnap interrupted, opening his eyes. He looked at Jen until his message seemed to sink in and she nodded, bringing up her other arm to hug him.

“I’ll see you soon.” Jen said, rubbing Sapnap’s back for a second before pulling away.

“We were going to swing by the schools to say bye to-”

“*Don’t*- or at least not the younger ones. They haven’t seen, uh.” She paused, her gaze dropping to Sapnap’s cheek and lip before returning to his eyes. “Say bye to Andy though, I’ll come up with something to tell Ben and Mari.” Jen said with another forced smile.

It hurt Sapnap to see her still feeling the need to protect his dad, his reputation, how people perceived him. It hurt, but he understood the feeling. Jen wasn’t someone who gave up on people, his dad being no exception.

“Okay, okay I’ll let you handle talking to them.” Sapnap nodded, looking over her shoulder towards the front of the house.

“Thank you.” She said, pulling her hand away fully. “Karl, he’s waiting downstairs for you. You’ve found a good one. I’m glad you have him.” Jen looked over her shoulder towards the stairs as well.

“Let’s hope I didn’t fuck that up.” Sapnap mumbled, adjusting the bags one last time, and heading down the hall.

“Love is a powerful thing, Nick.” Jen said, causing Sapnap to stop in his tracks.

“It is.” Sapnap agreed, turning to look at her over his shoulder. She glanced towards the stairwell to his room before looking back. “But love isn’t *always* enough.” Sapnap finished, looking away before he had to see her face fall.

“Be good.” Jen called out from behind him.

“I always try.” Sapnap said from the top of the stairs, heading down to Karl while she headed up to his dad.

The house was silent, no sign of Karl in sight. Sapnap figured he must’ve gone out to wait in the car. He nearly made it all the way to the front door before he heard a bit of rustling behind him. He turned around, his eyes immediately landing on Karl standing in the side room.

“Karl-” Sapnap set down the bags, walking towards Karl. He stopped just a few feet shy of Karl, realizing he was the only one decreasing the distance between them.

The look on Karl’s face was apprehensive at best. Sapnap could tell that there was a piece of Karl

that wanted to melt into his arms, but he was still hesitant to come near.

“Are you... ready to leave?” Sapnap asked, taking a slow step away from Karl. The bags Karl brought down weren’t with him anymore, so Sapnap was guessing he put them in the car and then chose to come back in and wait.

Karl nodded his head slowly, soon stopping and beginning to shake his no head instead. As soon as he shook his head, he walked towards Sapnap with his arms open, his bottom lip shaking.

“μωπό μου.” Sapnap mumbled, meeting Karl halfway and pulling him to his chest. “I’m sorry, we should’ve left yesterday when you first asked. You shouldn’t have had to see this.” Sapnap apologized, petting the back of Karl’s head.

“Why did this happen?” Karl asked, pushing his face into Sapnap’s neck. “I thought- I thought he was *better* now?” Karl cried.

Sapnap wished he had an answer, something that could possibly comfort Karl in a time like this. In lieu of that, Sapnap held Karl tighter, hushing him.

“Let’s just get you out of here. Let’s get you safe.” Sapnap mumbled, finding the strength to pull away enough to kiss Karl’s cheek. Karl leaned down, pressing his forehead against Sapnap’s. After taking a few breaths, Karl nodded in agreement, standing back up straight.

“Let’s go.” Karl said under his breath, linking his hand in Sapnap’s as they walked towards the front door, grabbing the rest of the bags on their way out.

Sapnap made it all the way to his car, still hand in hand with Karl, without looking back. He and Karl put the few bags Sapnap brought down into his trunk, standing outside the car. The spring breeze was warmer today, the sun shining as if there was nothing out of balance in the world.

“Are you okay?” Sapnap asked, reaching out for Karl’s hand before he could head towards his car door.

“I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again- I will be once I know you are.” Karl answered with potentially the saddest smile Sapnap had ever seen.

“I’m sorry, I really can’t say it enough. I’m so, so, *so* sorry.” Sapnap apologized, stepping forward just enough to rest his head on Karl’s shoulder. He did his best to still give Karl a small amount of space, holding himself back from fully leaning into Karl.

“Stop apologizing- *please*.” Karl said back, wrapping his arms around Sapnap’s shoulders. Sapnap accepted the invitation, putting his hands around Karl’s waist and pulling him flush against his chest.

“I’m apologizing because I *need* to. You were right, I provoked my dad this morning. I could’ve chosen to ignore his comments- his *look*, but I didn’t. I’m the one who was-”

“This is his fault, not yours. He’s the parent here, not you.” Karl interrupted, tightening the grip he had around Sapnap. Sapnap felt guilty hearing this, still convinced he was the one who ruined the rest of their trip.

“No, Karl, you don’t get it. This morning, I was being so horrible and-”

Sapnap was unable to finish his thought, as Karl’s lips crashed into his own. Karl was cupping his face in his hands, holding him as closely as he could. Sapnap couldn’t fight his body’s natural

desire to melt into Karl's embrace, letting him kiss away his every sorrow.

"You shouldn't talk so poorly about the guy I'm in love with." Karl mumbled, breaking the kiss long enough to brush his nose against Sapnap's a few times before leaning down to kiss him again.

"Karl- Karl." Sapnap tried to say between the kisses, torn between pulling Karl closer or pushing him away.

"Stop acting like you know how I feel about you better than I do. Stop acting like it's crazy for me to love you." Karl spoke before Sapnap could say anything, already able to tell that Sapnap was going to dispute his confession.

"But-"

"Just tell me you love me too." Karl requested in a whisper, keeping his eyes closed and his forehead pressed against Sapnap's.

"I *love* you." Sapnap answered instantly, pulling Karl back down to his lips. He could feel Karl's lips tightening into a smile against his own, a few laughs filling the air between them.

Sapnap pulled away, finally leaning back enough to actually look at Karl. The sun was glistening in Karl's eyes, making their blueish-gray hue truly look like diamonds. His eyes were beautiful. His kiss-swollen lips were beautiful. His flushed cheeks were beautiful.

His *everything* was beautiful.

"My god, I'm so fucking in love with you." Sapnap's thoughts escaped him, his lips moving before his mind could filter what he was going to say.

"If you love me, take me home." Karl said with a softening smile, like he too believed that maybe everything was going to be okay.

Chapter End Notes

pls don't kill me i swear i was just as angry and confused writing this chapter as you are reading it

The light you seek is within you

Chapter Summary

Sapnap and Karl leave Texas (about damn time)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"I'll be quick- in and out, I promise." Sapnap said to Karl as soon as the car was in park. It felt like a lifetime ago that they were back here at his old high school, walking through the halls together, hand in hand, rewriting the past.

"I can go with you." Karl offered, running his hand over Sapnap's.

"No, it's okay. I'll tell him goodbye for-"

"Bye, not *goodbye*. This isn't the last time I'm ever gonna see him." Karl corrected, a weary smile on his tired face. Sapnap leaned forward, gently pulling Karl in by the back of his neck so he could kiss his cheek.

"I'll tell Andrew you said bye. I'll be back soon." Sapnap said with a smile, looking Karl in the eyes until he nodded in agreement, allowing Sapnap to leave the car in peace.

Sapnap jogged towards the school at first, slowing his pace as he approached the main entrance. Memories flooded his mind and if he had more time, he might've let himself take a trip down memory lane. For now, though, Sapnap ascended the stairs two at a time, making his way to the front office.

"Hi, I'm Nick Armstrong, my brother is Andrew Armstrong. Can you call him down to the office? I won't keep him from class for very long, promise." Sapnap asked the plump woman sitting at the desk. She was a different attendant than the one he had when he was in school, which Sapnap was taking as a good thing, seeing that that woman was the devil reincarnated.

"Are you on the pick-up list?" She asked, looking at him with an unamused expression, her gaze peering just over the glasses sitting on the tip of her nose.

"Uh, probably not. I'm not picking him up though, I'm just trying to say-"

"I can't call down a student for someone who isn't on the pick-up list." She interrupted, looking back to her computer. Sapnap rolled his eyes, realizing that having the personality of wet cardboard must be a requirement for the job.

"Seriously? I'm his brother- we have the same last name! Here, look at my license." Sapnap said, pulling out his wallet and holding it up to the glass. She gave it the same unamused glance as before, probably not even taking the time to read his full name.

"Not on the list." She repeated, her monotone voice unchanged.

"Are you- oh! Cam!" Sapnap cut himself off, taking a step back when he saw a familiar face

walking down the hall.

"Nick?" Cam questioned, heading straight for Sapnap.

"Hey, do you know what class Andy's in right now? Can you grab him and bring him here for me?" Sapnap asked, earning a confused look but a head nod in agreement regardless from Cam. He left without another word, turning to head back in the direction he came from.

Sapnap faced the receptionist, trying to give her a smug look, but she was typing away on her keyboard, completely aloof to the situation. He rolled his eyes, stepping away from the desk and into the main foyer.

"Dude, what are you doing here?" Andrew called out from the end of the hall, making his way to Sapnap.

"Hey, man." Sapnap said, opening his arms. Andrew looked hesitantly at the invitation before leaning down, giving Sapnap a few heavy slaps to the back. They both pulled away quickly, not used to being physically affectionate with one another.

"So, Karl and I are leaving, like, right now." Sapnap said after a second of silence went by.

"You're going back to Florida?" Andrew asked, his face just as confused as before. Sapnap guessed he didn't fully process the news yet.

"Yeah, to Florida. And, uh, about dad... maybe *don't* tell him about Cam- not for a little while at least. Don't tell Ben the real reason I'm leaving either. I guess, uh, I guess Jen wants to talk to him and Mari about it." Sapnap said regretfully, finding it hard to look his little brother in the eye.

"Did he hit you again?" Andrew asked, his voice lowered to a whisper and his eyes growing wide.

"Not *really*, I mean-" Sapnap cut himself off, rubbing the back of his head where he had hit it against the ground from their dad shoving him in the yard that morning. "It turns out he wasn't as 'okay' with me being gay as I thought. He was only putting on a show for Jen. That show ended when he... when he drank this morning." Sapnap explained, rubbing his face with a sigh.

"Look, I just want to know you're going to be safe. I also want you to know I'm not leaving like how I left before. I'm going to visit more often, hey- I *swear*." Sapnap nudged Andrew's arm when he looked away, refusing to speak a word. It was clear that Andrew was disappointed about much more than just their premature departure.

"So I'll be lucky if I see you twice a year instead of not at all?" Andrew said a bit sarcastically under his breath.

"We'll see each other once a month...eh, every other month." Sapnap said, tilting his head from side to side, doing the mental math.

"You said that Texas wasn't a safe place for you to be. You came back for less than a week and you're leaving with a black eye and a split lip. I don't expect you to put yourself in danger because I miss you- I don't *want* you to-"

"I'm not going to stay at home anymore when I visit, which will make things exponentially safer for me. And hey, I expect you to start coming out to Florida to see me- planes fly both ways." Sapnap interrupted with a raised eyebrow and a half smile.

Andrew paused, letting out a bit of a sigh himself. He looked over his shoulder in the direction he

came, his shoulders tensing visibly.

"Summer vacation starts in June- that's not even two months away. Next time I see you, I'll fly you and Ben out to Florida. We'll go to Universal, the beach, Disney- *wherever* you guys want. That's a promise." Sapnap continued, leaning to the side to catch Andrew's attention.

"Can Cam come too?" Andrew asked, a smile growing on his lips. Sapnap rolled his eyes, letting out a laugh.

"Don't push it- you've gotta keep him long enough for that to happen." Sapnap nodded his head in agreement despite his initial dismissal.

"Always so *possessive*." Andrew laughed, nudging Sapnap's shoulder.

"Christ, go back to class. I'll text you later." Sapnap deflected, taking a step away from Andrew. He turned around, heading back in the direction of his class.

"Andy!" Sapnap called out, feeling a bit of satisfaction in the annoyed huff from the receptionist, seeing that calling out his brother's name seemed to gain her attention this time.

"Karl says bye!" Sapnap waved, laughing at the confused smile on his brother's face.

"Sir, you need to leave." She said sternly, looking up from her computer.

"Don't have to tell me twice." Sapnap muttered, giving her less than friendly smile on his way out. He pushed open the front doors, welcoming the warm breeze against his skin. He jogged all the way to the parking lot, not stopping until his eyes landed on Karl sitting in the car.

Karl was sitting in the passenger seat, both his legs pulled to his chest, while he rested his chin on his knees to scroll his phone.

It didn't quite make sense, but just seeing Karl waiting for him made something click in Sapnap's mind. Something about knowing that the smile he brings to Karl's face isn't platonic, holding his hand isn't platonic, saying '*I love you*' isn't platonic- it made Sapnap's heart race.

There, sitting in his car, was his boyfriend, his first love, and his *best* friend. He was sitting there, waiting for *him* and no one else.

"Hi." Sapnap said with a bit of a breathless smile, opening his door after jogging the rest of the way to the car.

"I want orange juice." Karl answered, leaning his head back against the headrest, puckering his bottom lip out slightly.

"Moron." Sapnap giggled, kneeling on his seat so he could reach Karl, planting a kiss on his lips. He could tell Karl was shocked from how sudden it was, but that didn't stop him from holding Karl's face in his hands to pull him in closer.

There was some kind of irony to the situation in Sapnap's mind- the way he saw Karl simply *existing* and thought about how lucky he was that things worked out. Meanwhile, Karl saw him and thought about orange juice.

"Should I pitch making pit stops more often?" Karl asked between the kisses with a laugh, setting down his phone so he could wrap his arms around Sapnap.

Sapnap smiled into the kiss, pressing his hand heavily on Karl's lower back to bring him in closer. He wanted to live in this moment, to commit to memory the feeling of Karl on his lips.

"Sap- okay, come on." Karl said, trying to break the kiss, a laugh still embedded in each word. Sapnap instead trailed his lips over Karl's cheek and down his neck, addicted to the taste of Karl on his tongue.

"Can we at least-" Karl paused, moving his neck to the side to give Sapnap a better angle. "-leave the school grounds first?" Karl finished his thought. Sapnap hummed against his neck, making note of all the places he already kissed so he could remember where to pick up later.

"I *guess*." Sapnap said dramatically, looking over to Karl with a smile to show he was joking. "Let's go get you some juice." He continued, pulling out of the school parking lot.

The highway stretched on endlessly before them, the sun making its way across the sky. They had stopped to get juice, and snacks, and a late lunch, and about five extra times for Karl to use the restroom.

"Take this exit, I need to pee." Karl instructed, while pointing at a sign reading two miles to the next rest stop.

"Με δουλεύεις? (Greek to English translation: Are you kidding me?)" Sapnap sighed, veering into the right lane, getting ready to take the upcoming exit.

"Σκάσε. (Greek to English translation: shut up)" Karl responded, shifting in his seat uncomfortably.

"Σκάσε? Σκάσε? (Greek to English translation: Shut up? *Shut up?*) Do you even know what you just said?" Sapnap scoffed in disbelief.

"I said shut up." Karl shrugged, looking at Sapnap with a smug expression. He was so distracted by the way Karl was looking at him, he nearly missed the exit. He looked back at the road in time, successfully veering them towards the outskirts of New Orleans.

"Who taught you that?" Sapnap asked skeptically, pulling into one of the rest station parking spots.

"Don't worry about it." Karl shrugged, leaning over and kissing Sapnap's cheek while he was too surprised to stop him. He was also able to get out of the car before Sapnap could reach out and grab him.

"I'm gonna kill Andrew." Sapnap said under his breath, already figuring that he must've been the one to teach Karl a few Greek phrases.

It wasn't long before Karl came back into view, jogging with something in his hand. He opened the door and quickly sat back down, turning up the air conditioning and pointing it directly at his face.

"Look!" Karl said excitedly, tossing the paper to Sapnap, while continuing to relish in the cool air.

"A map?" Sapnap laughed, pointing to the tablet sized display on his dash, which also had a map pulled up.

"*Open* the map, moron." Karl laughed, reaching over to flick through a few pages. Sapnap shooed his hand away, looking through the pages himself.

"These are, like, hotels and stuff?" Sapnap questioned. They still had easily another two or three hours before it was dark, they wouldn't be able to even stay at one of the hotels in this area by the

time they'd stop driving, assuming they wouldn't just finish the trip in one go.

"Pick one." Karl smiled, finally turning the air conditioning down. The sound of whirling air no longer filled the car, making the sounds of the nearby highway come back into range.

"You want to stay *here* for the night, in New Orleans? Karl, it's only the late afternoon." Sapnap answered, closing the brochure with a slight whine in his voice. Sapnap felt like he'd spent the better half of the last year of his life in hotel rooms. At this point, he really just wanted to take refuge in his own bed.

"Please? I told you I wanted to see the sights." Karl said back with a much more endearing whine in his voice. Sapnap thought back to their conversation in the kitchen during Marisol's birthday party. Memories of Karl sitting pressed against his side, explaining that he was planning on road tripping back to Florida with him.

"You did." Sapnap sighed, opening the packet again. He tried to fight back his smile when he heard a giggle under Karl's breath. Maybe he was a simp- he really let Karl get away with everything.

"There's a Marriott not too far away. We could check in and then go-" Sapnap cut himself off, looking at the slightly disappointed expression on Karl's face. He gave the brochure one last glance before sighing. "You want to stay at the Four Seasons, don't you?" Sapnap asked.

Karl nodded eagerly, covering his mouth once he began laughing at Sapnap's annoyance. Sapnap already knew they'd be staying the night there and there was no more '*maybe*' about it- he was *definitely* a simp.

"You're lucky I love you." Sapnap said, almost panicking as soon as the words passed by his lips.

"I know I am." Karl answered without missing a beat. His response was so natural, like this was how it was meant to be all along- Sapnap loving Karl openly and honestly. The best part off all? Karl *reciprocated* that love back to him.

Sapnap drove them deep into the heart of New Orleans. The sidewalk was lined with people, making the drive a bit more stressful, but the look of excitement on Karl's face made it all worth it.

"Mardi Gras was a couple months ago, I'm surprised it's still so busy. This place must be a party year round or something." Sapnap said jokingly, returning his hand to Karl's thigh.

"I love it. Don't get me wrong, being in the middle of nowhere for a few days was great-"

"But you'll always prefer the city." Sapnap finished his thought, turning his hand over on Karl's leg, intertwining their fingers when Karl reached for his hand.

"What, uh, what do *you* prefer?" Karl asked, his tone much more hesitant sounding than before. He rolled up his window, blocking out most of the yelling and jazz music from the streets.

"Country or city? I've never thought about it. Each has their own pros and cons, I guess." Sapnap shrugged. In all honesty, he was rather indifferent about it. The location he lived in never really mattered. For him, it was all about the people around him.

"Pfft. Don't give me such a diplomatic answer. Pick one, city or country." Karl said with a laugh, turning his attention fully to Sapnap now.

"Uh, I don't know. Maybe, like, the outskirts of a city. You're far enough away from the light-

pollution that you can still see the stars at night, while also being within a 30 minute drive from everything." Sapnap answered. Traffic was now at a stand still, allowing him to turn and face Karl.

"But if you're *in* the city then you don't even have to drive! You can walk *anywhere*." Karl said, clearly trying to convince Sapnap that city living was better than rural.

"Why ask me what I prefer if you're going to respond like this when my answer isn't the same as yours?" Sapnap asked through a laugh, reaching over to adjust a few of Karl's hairs. Sapnap never failed to admire the look of bliss on Karl's face the second his fingers trailed through his hair.

"Because these things matter now." Karl answered in more of a mumble, his eyes opening slowly when Sapnap's hand pulled away.

"My opinion only matters now that I'm your boyfriend? *Wow*-" Sapnap was cut off with a laugh and Karl hitting him in the arm.

"It *matters* because, I don't know. I mean, I don't want to stay in North Carolina forever. I'm guessing you don't want to stay with Dream forever. Even before we started dating, I always kind of assumed if either of us were to move, it would be to live with the other." Karl explained, trailing his hand across Sapnap's, still holding onto it tightly.

"Are you asking me to move in with you?" Sapnap asked after a few seconds ticked by, the information just now registering in his mind.

"Well, not right *now*, you know. Just thinking about the future, planting the seed or whatever." Karl answered, his tone laced with the hint of regret, maybe even a tinge of embarrassment.

"*Yes*- I mean, whenever you're re- uh." Sapnap paused with a laugh, pulling Karl's hand to his lips and kissing the back of it. When words failed him, he always knew that he could simply *show* Karl his emotions.

"Okay, don't get *so* excited." Karl said with a growing smile. "This is like, who even knows- *years* away." Karl continued, trying to pull his hand away when Sapnap continued to kiss the back of it repeatedly.

"You want to live together." Sapnap said with a smile wider than he knew he was capable of producing spread across his face, his cheeks beginning to ache.

"You're a moron, forget I said anything." Karl muttered, looking away. Sapnap had already seen the blush spread across Karl's cheeks, traveling all the way to the tips of his ears. Despite looking away, Karl kept his arm outstretched to Sapnap, allowing him to kiss along every knuckle.

"Let's do a test run tonight." Sapnap pitched, turning into the hotel parking lot.

"A test run of what?" Karl asked, his brows furrowed and blush faded.

"A trial run of living together." Sapnap said with a smile.

"Oh my god, I *really* shouldn't have said-"

"Hear me out." Sapnap interrupted, tapping Karl's hand repeatedly with his thumb.

"Sap, this is so far from the first time we've stayed the night together. What's going to make this any different?" Karl asked, looking at Sapnap with a doe-eyed expression. Karl's voice may sound uninterested in his idea, but his eyes gave away all his curiosity.

"We can go to the nearest store, pick out some ingredients to make dinner in our hotel room- *no* ordering food. Then we can go for a sunset walk around the town after we eat, instead of sitting on our phones or streaming. Then we can bicker about what movie we should watch, even though you're going to fall asleep during the opening credits." Sapnap said with fondness swimming through each passing proposition.

"I can't tell if you're making fun of me or if you actually want to do those things." Karl admitted, looking away again.

"μωπό μου, why would you question that?" Sapnap asked, his smile faltering and the grip he had on Karl's hand tightening.

"I don't know. Those things aren't *grand*, they're not *special*. You love when things are over the top but that sounds like a typical Monday night." Karl shrugged, still not looking at Sapnap, but at least looking at their hands held in his lap.

"Grand? Maybe not. But *special*? Of course that's special. I want to have typical Monday nights with you- I want to have typical *every* night of the week with you." Sapnap said with a laugh, tugging on Karl's hand.

Karl looked over, his face still begging for reassurance. It was endearing to Sapnap, in a way. He could tell that Karl wanted to make sure the time they got to spend together to be *unforgettable*. Karl just hadn't realized that Sapnap already viewed any time they spent together as just that- unforgettable.

"Listen to me, μωπό μου. I want to do so many *grand* things with you. I want to take you on vacation to Greece and show you all the places I loved as a kid. I want you to show me around New York when it's *not* a million degrees and everything smells bad." Sapnap laughed at Karl's scoff, knowing fully well how Karl felt about his lackluster impression of New York City.

"But what I want more than those great, big things- I want *peace*. I want to listen to music and act like idiots in the kitchen while we try to cook a meal. I want to fight over who gets to push the grocery cart when we go to the store. I want to do absolutely nothing all day but lay in bed with you." Sapnap continued, leaning his head against the back of his seat.

"You wouldn't find that boring?" Karl asked, reaching forward to brush a rogue curl out of Sapnap's face. Sapnap gently grabbed onto Karl's wrist before he could pull it away, holding it flush against his cheek.

"*Boring*?" Sapnap asked in disbelief. "Having a good old-fashioned, boring, mundane, *average* night sounds like the most exciting thing in the world to me, as long as it's with you." Sapnap smiled.

"You really mean that?" Karl questioned, caressing Sapnap's cheek with his thumb, a smile finally growing on his lips.

"One-hundred percent." Sapnap turned his head just enough to kiss Karl's thumb.

"Promise?" Karl asked, leaning forward.

"I promise." Sapnap said quietly, extending a hand to push on Karl's chest, denying him the opportunity to get any closer. "But that bellboy has been patiently waiting to get our bags for five minutes now and I don't think my windows are *that* tinted." Sapnap whispered, darting his gaze towards the windshield.

"Oh." Karl whispered back with a laugh under his breath, leaning away from Sapnap.

Sapnap did his best to hide his laughter as he opened the car door, but was unsuccessful as soon as he noticed the way Karl was practically trying to hide from the employee.

"Hi there. Do you have any city view executive suites available?" Sapnap asked, ignoring Karl poke his lower back repeatedly for laughing at him. He tried to reach his arm behind him without looking *too* strange to the desk attendant, grabbing Karl's hand.

"Not a problem. Oh! We actually have *one* premier river-view room available- that one has two queen beds instead of just one king. Would you like to go with that instead?" She asked, looking rather proud of herself for finding it so quickly.

"No thank you, we'll take the room with one bed." Sapnap answered, intentionally pulling Karl forward by his wrist, making him bump into his back. She looked a bit flustered for a second before nodding, typing away at her computer. Once she entered Sapnap's credit card number and ID into the system, she held out two keycards over the counter.

"Enjoy your stay at the Four Seasons... *sirs*." She said with a smile, still looking rather embarrassed.

"Thanks." Sapnap answered, finally letting go of Karl to grab the key cards. Karl took a step back, rubbing his wrist dramatically as if Sapnap's grip *actually* hurt him. "You can leave the bags by the door and the card on the bedside table." Sapnap said, handing the bellboy with their trolley of luggage one of the cards.

"Come on, I want to bicker over pushing shopping carts." Sapnap said with a smile, grabbing onto Karl's hand as he made his way back towards the front entrance.

"I think I noticed some signs for a farmer's market when we were a couple blocks away. How about we cross off two things on our '*domestic date*' list and go for our walk and shop at the same time?" Karl pitched, quickening his pace to stand side by side with Sapnap.

"Oh yeah? What are you trying to free up time for?" Sapnap asked with a raised eyebrow and a smirk working its way onto his lips.

"Nevermind. We can go to a real store and I'm going to hit you in the ankles with the cart." Karl rolled his eyes, dropping Sapnap's hand.

"μωρό μου, μωρό μου-" Sapnap said through a laugh, reaching forward to shut Karl's door as soon as he opened it. Sapnap pulled out his keys, waving to the valet who was standing close by. "Let's walk to the farmer's market." Sapnap said with a smile, handing the valet his keys with one hand and intertwining his fingers with Karl's using his other hand.

"I want fresh bread." Karl said in a 'matter-of-fact' tone, allowing Sapnap to lead him towards the sidewalk.

"We can see if there's any fresh bread still for sale." Sapnap laughed, shaking his head.

"And stuff to make guacamole." Karl continued, still not looking at Sapnap.

"Guacamole sounds good." Sapnap shrugged, intentionally bumping into Karl's shoulder with each step.

"And I want-"

"It's a yes, okay? Whatever you want, it's a yes." Sapnap interrupted, shaking his head with an idiotic grin. He was in awe just looking at the way the natural light made Karl look radiant.

Sapnap already knew that his camera roll would soon be filled with photos of Karl smelling flowers at the farmer's market during golden hour.

Chapter End Notes

domestic fluff for the soul

speaking of domestic fluff, I think I'm going to take Between Friends off hiatus. I've been working on a chapter for a while (so far it's like 15k words... whoops) and it made me remember how much I love writing dnf's dynamic. So yeah, keep an eye out for that if you read my fluff shot collection <3

You are not alone

Chapter Summary

Sapnap and Karl continue their road trip. Karl opens up to Sapnap about some of the insecurities he's had about their relationship.

Chapter Notes

This chapter goes out to all my fellow ace spectrum friends <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"It needs more salt."

"Well, we don't *have* more salt."

"But it needs salt."

Sapnap let out a defeated sigh, a dry laugh soon following. He and Karl were in the midst of making dinner, using their hotel room's kitchenette to its full potential. They had purchased all the ingredients to make guacamole and dinner from the farmers market; however, they didn't think about the utensils and supplies they'd need.

Upon realizing this, Sapnap had gone out to his car to get his knife, while Karl had scoured through all the drawers in search of salt and pepper packets. Even so, the task of making dinner seemed to be much greater than either of them were anticipating.

"Sap, do you love me?" Karl asked in a whine, abandoning his station and making his way over to Sapnap, resting his head on his shoulder from behind.

"Do I really need to answer that?" Sapnap asked back, his voice borderline a scoff.

"Can we please just order food? We're really bad chefs." Karl's tone was cavity sweet, like if he were as nice as possible, maybe Sapnap would agree.

Sapnap sighed, leaning against Karl's chest. He set down his pocket knife, which really shouldn't have been used to cut tomatoes anyway, seeing that it was just squishing them from how dull it was. Sapnap turned his face to the side, kissing Karl's temple. As soon as he felt Sapnap's lips on his skin, Karl lifted his forehead off Sapnap's shoulder so he could look at him.

"*Please*." Karl asked again, wrapping his arms around Sapnap's chest.

"Take out sounds good." Sapnap answered. Even though he tried to sound a bit reluctant- seeing that Karl made such a fuss about wanting to make guacamole, he was actually quite relieved they could give up.

"My boyfriend is the best." Karl said, kissing the side of Sapnap's head three times in a row before

he pulled away. Sapnap turned around, finding himself a bit disappointed that the warmth growing between them had already faded away.

"You were just cuddling me to get the answer you wanted." Sapnap said in disbelief, watching Karl pull out his phone and sit in a chair by the window.

"It's not my fault you're easy to persuade." Karl teased, looking over his shoulder with his hand already pulled up to cover his smile.

Sapnap began walking towards Karl, a look of fear flashing across Karl's face. Sapnap lunged forward just before Karl could stand and run away from him. Sapnap grabbed Karl's hand as soon as he began laughing, pulling it away from his face.

"Stop hiding my favorite thing in the world." Sapnap said, taking the opportunity to admire Karl's smile without an obstructed view.

"Oh my god, *shut up*." Karl deflected, rolling his eyes and looking away. Sapnap stayed leaned over Karl, grabbing his other hand as well.

"What? You think I'm lying? *Oh*, I see. You're fishing for compliments again." Sapnap laughed, continuing to lean over Karl, trying to get him to look at him.

"So what if I am?" Karl asked, his face reddening but his eyes still looking away from Sapnap.

"Do I not compliment you enough?" Sapnap asked, loosening his grip a bit. "Like, I'm being serious. Would you like it if I complimented you more?" Sapnap fully released Karl's hands, instead gently holding Karl's cheek, encouraging him to face him.

"I don't want to *ask* you to compliment me, it defeats the purpose-"

"I compliment you all day in my head. I think about how beautiful you are, how happy you make me, how cute your hair looks when the wind messes it up a little. I've kept them to myself because, I don't know, I didn't want to be *too much*. Tell me it's not too much and I'll let you know every compliment that crosses my mind." Sapnap explained, his eyes finally locking with Karl's once he made his request.

"That's not too much. I want to know those things- I want to know how you see me." Karl answered, looking up at Sapnap with those big blue eyes he knew he loved at first sight.

"You're going to get annoyed with me if I start saying all that stuff out loud." Sapnap warned with a smile and fondness in his voice he reserved only for Karl.

"I could never get annoyed with you- except, you know, whenever you're being annoying." Karl answered with a giggle, looking away briefly before looking back, like he had nearly forgotten what Sapnap said about not hiding his smile anymore.

"είσαι όμορφη αγάπη μου (Greek to English translation: You are beautiful, my love)." Sapnap answered, causing the smile on Karl's face to transform into confusion.

"What did you just say?" Karl asked, his smile starting to return but his squint still skeptical, like he couldn't tell if Sapnap was hiding behind the language barrier to compliment or insult him.

"ντροπιάζεις τον ήλιο με το πόσο λάμπεις, αστεράκι μου (Greek to English translation: You put the sun to shame with how brightly you shine, my little star)." Sapnap continued, ignoring Karl's question and confusion altogether.

"Wait- I want to *understand* the compliments!" Karl exclaimed with a laugh, reaching out and grabbing onto Sapnap's wrists when he tried to pull away.

"Maybe your little *friend* who taught you 'Σκάσε' will just have to give you more Greek lessons." Sapnap shrugged, effectively pulling Karl along with him as he stood up.

Karl gave Sapnap his signature pout, furrowing his brows together, puckering his bottom lip, and making his eyes look impossibly doe-like. This was a look that Sapnap had caved to a hundred times in the past and, without a doubt, he would also cave to countless times in the future. However, for now, Sapnap held his ground.

"You're really not going to tell me." Karl said in disbelief, his statement sounding more like a question. Sapnap couldn't help but let out a chuckle and the shocked expression on Karl's face, like he was astounded that Sapnap wasn't giving in to what he wanted.

"Maybe I'm not so *easy* after all." Sapnap taunted, leaning forward to kiss Karl.

Karl leaned away before their lips could touch, but that didn't stop Sapnap. He easily pulled his wrists out of Karl's grasp, wrapping them around his waist to prevent him from getting away. Karl used his height to his advantage, stretching his neck as far back as he could, successfully keeping his lips out of Sapnap's reach.

"How about this- kiss me and *I'll* be your Greek teacher." Sapnap proposed, a smile growing on his face when Karl slowly stopped extending his neck.

"Deal?" Sapnap asked, releasing Karl's waist with one hand, instead using it to hold the side of Karl's face. Instead of answering, Karl leaned forward, giving Sapnap a very uninterested kiss, pulling away almost immediately to show his displeasure with the agreement.

"Αγάπη χωρίς πείσματα δεν έχει νοστιμάδα (Greek to English translation: Love without a bit of stubbornness isn't tasteful)." Sapnap said with a laugh. He never understood what that saying meant when he was a kid, but he was quickly beginning to understand it more and more.

"You're impossible." Karl rolled his eyes, continuing to push away. Sapnap let him go this time, watching him walk across the room for no purpose other than to put distance between them.

"I love you." Sapnap said with a smile on his face, taking the seat Karl left behind. One of Sapnap's favorite things since he had been honest with Karl about how he felt was the way Karl reacted to how he said 'I love you'.

Without fail, Karl would always begin to roll his eyes, since he'd been so used to hearing the phrase for the last year. It was never until a second or two went by that Karl seemed to remember the gravity behind the way Sapnap was saying those little three words to him.

Seeing the sense of surprise and genuine happiness that only appeared as a shadow across Karl's face when that information registered- *that* had quickly become one of Sapnap's new favorite things.

"I love you." Karl answered, looking down at his phone. He was hiding his face but he couldn't hide his smile, not from Sapnap. Sapnap's ears were fine tuned to be able to pick up even the slightest change in Karl's tone.

"Sit with me and we'll order dinner." Sapnap said with a smile, pushing the chair closer to the window, as the sun was nearly completely set outside. Karl, whether he intended to admit it aloud or not, appeared to be relieved to receive the invitation, as he immediately made his way back over

to Sapnap.

The two squeezed into the chair, half sat on top of each other, while they ordered food and watched the last few minutes of the hazy night sky become devoid of light and color. City lights shined brightly in place of stars and for once, Sapnap didn't miss a night free from light pollution.

It wasn't long before their food arrived and the two finally settled in for the night. Sapnap had set up a movie on the TV, despite the fact neither of them were interested in watching the screen.

Karl was the first to fall asleep, his head weighing heavily on Sapnap's chest. With each deep breath he took and incoherent mumbles soon following, Sapnap could tell that Karl was having a much more restful sleep than he had any other night of the trip.

Part of him liked to think it was because they were in a city, where Karl could comfortably fall asleep to the familiar sounds of cars honking and the noises of city-life. Another piece of him knew that it was likely because they were out of Texas- they were away from his dad. Even so, Sapnap decided to believe he was sleeping so peacefully because Karl was in his favorite place.

Cradled in Sapnap's arms.

This was Sapnap's favorite place as well. Even though Karl seemed to think that Sapnap needed to decide between living in a city or the countryside to be happy, *this* was what Sapnap meant when he said he didn't care. The location he was in never mattered, as long as he was with the people he loved. As long as he was with *Karl*.

Sapnap was soon to follow Karl's lead, finding his eyelids weighing more heavily now. He tried to fight falling asleep, wanting even just a few more minutes to take in the simplicity of this one perfect moment. Alas, Sapnap succumbed to slumber, falling asleep with his face buried in Karl's back and his body pressed flush against his boyfriend's.

"Call-ee-mare-uh."

Sapnap opened his eyes in quick flutters, trying to adjust to the influx of light that invaded their hotel room. His arms instinctively tightened around Karl, pulling him in closer. He closed his eyes again when Karl rolled over to face him, hands immediately beginning to run through his hair.

"Wait, what?" Sapnap asked, his voice sounding hoarse and throaty from just waking up.

"I *said*, call-ee, uh, call-ee-mare-uh?" Karl repeated, the phrase sounding more like a question this time.

"You're trying to say Καλημέρα, right? Good morning?" Sapnap questioned, his voice just as mumbled as before. Normally he would tease Karl about his poor pronunciation, but at that moment, the only thing on Sapnap's mind was counting Karl's heartbeat, as he rested his head on Karl's chest.

"You were sleeping and I didn't want to wake you, so I couldn't play the little voice thing on google translate, okay? I was just going off the phonetic spelling." Karl said with a scoff painted in fondness, like there was no way he could be upset with Sapnap over something so trivial.

"I like when you speak in Greek." Sapnap answered quietly, dragging his chin across Karl's chest until he reached his neck, peppering it with light kisses.

"I like when you kiss me like this." Karl answered with a carefree tone to his voice, which made it all the more confusing for Sapnap when he could tell Karl was tensing up.

"I like... kissing you like this too... but is something wrong? Is it my beard? I can shave or-"

"I like your beard- how it feels." Karl interrupted. Sapnap had leaned away from Karl's chest, propping himself up on his elbow so he could have a better look at the older boy laying below him.

"Then what's the matter?" He asked, reaching forward to hold Karl's cheek. Normally he found it endearing how Karl would pull his bottom lip between his teeth when he was nervous, but right now, Sapnap was wrapped up in thoughts about *what* was making Karl nervous.

"I like when you kiss me like *this*- like you're not, I don't know, expecting anything from me." Karl answered with a shrug, leaning his face against Sapnap's palm.

"Expecting something from you?" Sapnap echoed back, his brows knitting together, causing his forehead to crease from the tension.

"I didn't want to say anything because, well, I guess I don't actually know if you're expecting something. I just meant that I *feel* like you aren't, which is nice- but I'd also understand if you were or-"

"*Slow*, hey, slow down, *αγάπη μου* (Greek to English translation: my love)." Sapnap interrupted, doing his best to rub his thumb in soothing circles over Karl's cheek. It seemed like Karl appreciated the interruption, taking the opportunity to catch his breath.

"You're my boyfriend." Karl stated, almost looking at Sapnap for approval.

"And you're my boyfriend." Sapnap answered with a smile. The corners of Karl's mouth were beginning to curve, but his eyes still looked more worried than Sapnap would like.

"And we're, like, *in love*." Karl said and the worry seemed to drop from his eyes for a moment when the hint of a laugh escaped him.

"Yes, and we're, *'like, totally in love and stuff*." Sapnap answered, mocking the tone Karl used, making him laugh again.

"I'm just saying that when people are in a relationship and love each other... it's kind of assumed that they're going to do *things* together. And, well, we haven't. It's not that I don't think I'll *ever* want to or something. All I'm trying to say is that the way you kiss me, hold me, look at me, *everything*- you've never made me feel like you were expecting that from me or were disappointed when things didn't go further." Karl explained, his eyes appearing to search for reassurance from Sapnap.

"Karl, *of course* I'd never expect you to do anything you're not ready for!" Sapnap said with a near urgency in his voice, moving his hand from Karl's cheek to the back of his neck, making it so he could pull Karl to his chest.

"I'm sorry." Karl apologized, which only made Sapnap feel guiltier. Even though Karl explicitly said that Sapnap *didn't* make him feel that way, the fact that the worry still sat in Karl's mind that Sapnap *could* be disappointed by him- it broke his heart.

"Don't say you're sorry. *Please*, don't apologize to me right now." Sapnap hushed in Karl's ear, kissing the side of his head. He had no idea this was an insecurity that Karl had, let alone one that had trickled its way into their relationship.

"You wouldn't... leave me? Even if I never... I mean, I would understand if-"

"Stop, just *stop*." Sapnap interrupted, pulling away so he could look Karl in his watery eyes. "I don't know how I can say this any more clearly- I would never leave you over something as stupid as *sex*. Fuck, I mean, that's literally the *last* thing on my mind." Sapnap said through an exhale, holding Karl's face in his hands.

"Yeah?" Karl asked, his voice still hesitant.

"Karl, I meant it when I said that you, *exactly* as you are, have always been enough for me. I don't care what pace we move at- hell, I wouldn't even care if things never went further than *this*. I love sleeping next to you, I love kissing you, I love when you sit in my lap- yes, but most of all, I love *you*. I've *loved* you since the first time we met. I never needed sex to know that's how I felt and just because we're in a relationship now, doesn't mean that changed." Sapnap explained.

The look of relief on Karl's face was both heartbreaking and reassuring at the same time. Sapnap knew as Karl nodded before pushing his face back against his chest, that Karl seemed to finally understand the sincerity of his message.

"I love you." Karl's words were quiet and meek, barely audible beyond the fabric of Sapnap's t-shirt.

"I love you." Sapnap answered, returning his hand to Karl's back, rubbing slow circles across his shoulder blades.

"We should, uh, we should probably get up. Check out is at eleven." Karl said after giving himself another minute to find peace in Sapnap's embrace.

"Let me hold you for a bit longer." Sapnap disputed, tightening his grip around Karl. The light laugh that he exhaled was confirmation enough that Karl also wasn't ready to leave.

"How come you always know how gently I need to be held?" Karl asked, his hands slowly making their way up Sapnap's back until they became entangled in his too-long locks, which fell in loose curls down his neck.

"You're λουλούδι μου- my flower. Flowers are delicate, you need to be gentle with them." Sapnap answered, kissing Karl's forehead before resting his chin on the top of Karl's head. He was honestly expecting a scoff or something similar as a reaction, but instead Karl moved closer so they were lying chest to chest.

"How do you always know the perfect thing to say?" Karl asked, his voice more muffled this time. Sapnap could just barely feel Karl's lips grazing against his neck as he spoke. The slight friction alone was enough to make goosebumps raise across his skin.

"It's easy to talk to you. You're my best friend. You've always made me feel like I can speak whatever's on my mind." Sapnap sighed, leaning his head against his pillow, exposing Karl's face.

"Yeah?" Karl asked, the hesitancy and anxiety no longer at the forefront of his tone.

"Yes." Sapnap confirmed, lifting his head off the pillow and puckering his lips, waiting for Karl to close the distance between them.

The kiss was nothing spectacular, nothing like the way movies describe every kiss with the love of your life to be. The kiss was tender and sweet, but nothing short of a peck. It was a kiss that felt like a habit. It was a kiss that made Sapnap feel like he was *home*.

His home was wherever Karl was. The growing feeling in his chest, especially after their night of

bickering over how to make guacamole in their hotel room's kitchenette, could only be described as *domestic*.

"Okay now, really. We need to get out of bed." Karl insisted, this time actually sitting up as he spoke. Sapnap squinted at him, disappointed that the weight and warmth on his chest had left him.

"*And* I want to get orange juice for the road before breakfast closes." Karl rolled his eyes with a smile, successfully climbing out of bed before Sapnap could pull him back down.

"You and your damn orange juice." Sapnap groaned, falling back onto the bed, rolling over with the comforter wrapped around his waist.

"You're the one who made me like this." Karl called out from the other side of the room. Sapnap caught the final glimpse of Karl sliding out of his t-shirt and into a fresh crewneck.

"Made you like *what*?" Sapnap scoffed, feeling a bit less guilty about blatantly watching Karl change in front of him. In his defense, Karl never hesitated to watch *him* change.

"Made me want orange juice every day. *You're* the one who made me start drinking juice in the morning, since I don't eat breakfast." Karl answered with furrowed brows, like he was borderline offended that Sapnap could forget such a detail.

"You *actually* drink it every morning because of that?" Sapnap asked with a laugh, finally climbing out of bed and trying to piece together an outfit for himself.

"Yes, you moron." Karl answered, nudging Sapnap away from his suitcase. Sapnap didn't dispute Karl picking out an outfit for him. Seeing that their clothes were all mixed together, it would've been an even more annoying chore than it normally would have been.

"*Your* moron." Sapnap countered with a cheesy smile, hugging Karl from behind.

"Okay, you're not *my* moron. Not all of us are possessive, you know." Karl laughed, reaching one hand over his shoulder to ruffle Sapnap's hair.

"Hmm, I distinctly remember you telling me you don't like sharing, but only when it comes to *me*." Sapnap taunted, pressing his forehead against the back of Karl's neck.

"That was- no, I only said- ugh." Karl gave up trying to defend himself, burying his face in his hands. Sapnap let out a laugh, kissing Karl's neck a few times in quick succession before pulling away.

"Thank you for picking out clothes for me." Sapnap kissed Karl's brightly colored cheek before he could turn away, trying to hide his laugh to make sure he wouldn't *actually* annoy Karl.

Karl grumbled something under his breath, making his way back over to his suitcase to finish packing up. Sapnap changed into his clean clothes quickly, taking note of each time Karl's gaze seemed to linger in his direction. Before long, they were one glass of orange juice richer and back on the road.

Sapnap was thankful that Karl seemed to have enjoyed their prolonged pitstop enough to not constantly ask to stop and 'see the sights' again. At this point, as much as he loved spending time alone with Karl, there was only one thing on Sapnap's mind- his bed. More specifically, Karl in his bed with him, but still.

"Okay, okay-" Karl laughed, turning down the music after their impromptu karaoke style sing-off

of the High School Musical soundtrack.

"No way, I was about to *crush* you at-"

"*Sap.*" Karl interrupted, a smile still glued to his face. Sapnap couldn't help but feel his own smile grow, as he feverishly glanced between Karl and the highway before deciding to just turn on autopilot instead.

"Yes?" Sapnap answered, leaning back in his seat and comfortably resting his head to the side, solely gazing at Karl now.

"I want to make *one* more stop." Karl said, his eyes already pleading and his hands reaching out to grab Sapnap's arm when he groaned. "Hear me out!" Karl begged.

"μωπό μου, *please*, we only have a few more hours left." Sapnap whined, hoping the familiar Greek pet name, 'my baby,' would do him some favors in persuading Karl against making another stop.

"It's basically on the way, it'll only add, like, an hour to the-"

"An *hour*?" Sapnap interrupted with a dramatic sigh.

"Yes, an *hour*. We've been in this car and on the highway for practically a whole day. You know, our time in Texas was cut short, but I really did enjoy the scenic view. There's a ridge just past Tallahassee, there will be a pretty overlook where we can just sit in the grass and relax for a bit." Karl continued.

As much as Sapnap didn't want to admit it, the idea actually sounded quite serene. He knew exactly which overlook Karl was talking about too. One time when he and Dream lost power during a heatwave, Sapnap found himself driving all over Florida just to use the AC in his car. He found himself on the outskirts of Tallahassee, looking over the hills, and finally feeling the evening breeze on his skin.

"If you *really* want to, we can stop." Sapnap said through another sigh, doing his best to keep the reluctance in his voice. In all honesty, Sapnap actually found himself looking forward to their stop, seeing that they would probably be getting there just before sunset.

"Thank you." Karl answered sweetly, completely ignoring the lack of affection in Sapnap's tone. By the time he looked back in Karl's direction, he was already leaning over the center console, his eyes landing immediately on Sapnap's lips.

"You're going to get us pulled over." Sapnap said with a smile between kisses, knowing it was going to have to be Karl who pulled away, seeing that he only found himself leaning in deeper.

"You're no fun, such a rule follower." Karl retorted, slumping back into his own seat.

"Oh, *I'm sorry*. Didn't realize prioritizing the lives of everyone on the highway over a *kiss* made me such a loser." Sapnap scoffed, switching the car off autopilot.

"Well, it does." Karl answered, his tone nothing less than snarky.

"μωπό." Sapnap mumbled under his breath, a smile growing on his face when he heard Karl's audible scoff.

"Did you just call me a baby?" Karl asked, leaning back over the center console.

"Me? Pfft, *never*." Sapnap said sarcastically, flashing Karl a cheeky grin.

"You're lucky I love you." Karl rolled his eyes, his own smile beginning to peek through his annoyed façade.

"And I thank the universe for that every day." Sapnap smiled, his sarcastic tone fading as he reached over, holding Karl's hand in his own.

"Moron." Karl mumbled, interlocking their fingers before sliding down in his seat, settling back in for the rest of the drive.

After about an hour or so detour, Sapnap found himself parked at the top of the overpass, pulled off into the grass. He remembered exactly where the small overlook was that he ended up at last summer, admiring the view during his first Floridian heatwave.

"Wake up, my love. We're here." Sapnap whispered, brushing a few hairs behind Karl's ear. He wasn't surprised Karl had fallen asleep just a couple minutes after their 'argument' settled. Like always, he never minded the lack of conversation, since he knew how much Karl constantly needed to catch up on sleep.

"Whoa." Karl mumbled, his eyes opening in slow blinks, revealing two oceans of blue behind waves of dark lashes.

"Hmm?" Sapnap asked, continuing to stare fondly at Karl and tidy the hairs that had done array in his sleep.

"You said *my love* not, um, uh-gop-ee moo?" Karl questioned, rubbing one of his eyes while he spoke.

"Can I not call you my love? Only αγάπη μου?" Sapnap asked with a smile woven into each word. Karl seemed to be more awake now, beginning to take in their surroundings.

"You *can*, I'm just used to hearing it in Greek. Hearing you call me that in English would be, like, me calling you babe or something." Karl shrugged, adjusting in his seat and taking off his seat belt.

"You can call me babe, if you want." Sapnap answered, trying to fight the blush creeping onto his cheeks. 'Babe' was probably one of the most basic pet names and he wouldn't even consider himself fond of it, but hearing it from Karl- knowing Karl was referring to *him* as that? Suddenly the word had a completely different meaning.

"I like when you say things to me in Greek. It feels, I don't know, like it means more. I like when you say you love me in Greek, since that's how you grew up hearing it." Karl explained, chasing after Sapnap's hand when he began to pull away.

Sapnap let Karl bring his hand back to his lap, finding himself reaching to twist the rings on Karl's fingers.

"Those are what my mom used to call me and my brothers- all the little pet names I call you. It's funny, too, since she's not even Greek." Sapnap said with a laugh, looking out the front windshield.

"Why did she say them in Greek then?" Karl asked, following Sapnap's gaze, looking out to the open field before them.

"I guess it's a funny story. My parents met at a bar, my mom was a bartender in college and my dad was a regular. She refused to tell him her name, so he started calling her all these Greek pet names.

She kept the bit going for a while, seeing that she really began liking the nicknames he gave her. Turns out my dad had found out her name weeks before she even told him, but he went along with it because it made her happy." Sapnap explained, looking over to Karl. He wasn't shocked that Karl seemed to be confused by the story.

"Anyway, that's why she called me and my brothers those- it reminded her of a time when she and my dad were happy, innocent, carefree. That's how I felt when she called me καρδιά μου, ήλιε μου , λουλούδι μου, and so on." Sapnap smiled, rubbing his thumb over Karl's hand.

Before Karl could answer, Sapnap opened his car door, climbing out and heading over to Karl's side. He was able to open Karl's door for him, extending a hand to help him stand. Karl accepted the help, walking hand in hand with Sapnap to the overlook.

"So, why do you call *me* those things then?" Karl asked as they walked through the overgrown grass, approaching the edge of a small cliff, which overlooked all the hills in the distance.

"Because that's how you make me feel too." Sapnap answered, tugging on Karl's hand as he sat, encouraging Karl to join him.

Karl obliged, stretching out his legs onto the warm ground, having had an entire day of the late spring sun heating it.

"In a lot of ways, you make me feel like a kid again. Spending time with you feels like I'm getting back all that lost time spent hiding or hurting. You make me feel like it's not too late for me to be all those things- happy, carefree, *new*." Sapnap continued to explain, finding himself much more interested in the view by his side instead of in front of him.

"I make you feel like a little kid?" Karl asked, his head still tilted to the side and his usual confused pout on his face.

"I think so? I mean, I feel like you give me the feelings a kid *should* have. You know, like how safe I feel with you and like things are always going to be okay." Sapnap shrugged, looking back at the scenic view before them.

Karl had just said that morning that Sapnap somehow always knew the right thing to say, but for some reason, he felt like he was saying everything wrong. The last thing he wanted was for Karl to be weirded out by him.

"Being with me really makes you feel that way?" Karl asked. The unexpected waver in his voice made Sapnap dart his eyes back in Karl's direction.

There were obvious tears welling in Karl's eyes, each one glistening in the sun. The tip of his nose and the apples of his cheeks were rosy, as if they were surrounded by a winter's breeze and not the warm sunshine.

"Karl, I-"

"God, hearing that makes me feel so relieved." Karl interrupted, throwing his arms around Sapnap's shoulders. Sapnap found his arms moving in slow motion, wrapping around Karl's waist.

"Those are tears of *relief*?" Sapnap asked, nuzzling his face into the crook of Karl's neck. He felt the need to clarify, seeing that part of his brain was still worried about Karl pitying him and his childhood. Sapnap was afraid these were sad tears being shed over the childhood Sapnap never got.

"*Yes* they're relieved tears." Karl said with a laugh, adjusting his grip to pull Sapnap in closer. "All

I wanted was to make you feel safe- to rewrite all those bad memories you have. I thought- I thought when we had to leave Texas *early*, it meant I failed." Karl explained.

"Karl, you didn't *fail* at anything." Sapnap tried to assure him by pulling away to look in his eyes but Karl refused, keeping his chin hooked over Sapnap's shoulder.

"I make you feel like a kid again." Karl repeated and Sapnap could hear the smile in his voice. He didn't quite understand why this was something Karl seemed to be so focused on, but regardless, he seemed happy about it and that was all that mattered.

"You do." Sapnap confirmed, resting his head back on Karl's shoulder, laying a few kisses across Karl's exposed skin he could reach before pulling away, simply relaxing into the embrace.

Karl squeezed him just a bit tighter before pulling away, holding Sapnap's face in his hands. Sapnap couldn't help but reach up, using his thumbs to wipe away the residual tears that lingered on Karl's cheeks.

"I love you." Karl said with only the faintest hint of a smile on his lips, his eyes unwavering from Sapnap's. Something about the way he was saying it felt different this time, considering the seriousness of his tone.

Sapnap wasn't sure if maybe the reason this time felt different was because it was the first time Karl *truly* meant what he said. Either that, or maybe this was the first time Sapnap actually allowed himself to *believe* it.

"I love *you*." Sapnap answered, feeling tears begin to sting in the corners of his own eyes. He had no idea where this wave of emotions had come from, but they were beginning to take over.

Before Karl had the chance to react to his tears, Sapnap leaned forward, connecting their lips. As much as Sapnap found solace in the routine, habit-like, mundane kisses that were given without a second thought- *this* was the type of kiss he longed for.

A kiss that was raw and emotional. A kiss where it didn't matter if their lips were in sync like a perfectly choreographed dance. A kiss that puts every other thing in the physical world on the back burner. A kiss that was the physical embodiment of saying '*I love you*'.

The sun had just touched down on the horizon, promising a quickly approaching night. If they were smart, they would get in the car and leave now, ensuring their drive would conclude before nightfall. Instead, they melted into each other's arms, without a care in the world.

There are very few things in this world that are guaranteed, but Sapnap was certain of a few.

Every morning, the sun would rise. Every night, the moon and stars would shine. And *every* day, he would fall deeper in love with Karl.

Chapter End Notes

Had a bad week and needed some domestic fluff. Hope you enjoyed <3

You are not separate from every other thing

Chapter Summary

Sapnap and Karl arrive back at Sapnap and Dream's house

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The last glimpse of the sun had just sunk below the furthest hill in the distance, leaving the sky glowing. Pink and orange clouds filled the sky, surrounding Sapnap and Karl in a world of color. Warm air had already begun to cool without the sun, promising a night of palm trees dancing in the cool breeze.

"I'm gonna fall asleep." Sapnap mumbled, rubbing the side of his face against Karl's shoulder.

"I can drive the rest of the way. You drove us, like, *fourteen* hours. I think I can manage the last four." Karl answered quietly. Sapnap surprised even himself with how quickly he found himself nodding in agreement.

"That unfortunately means you need to at least get in the car before you fall asleep... baby." Karl spoke up again. There was a mixture between hesitancy and embarrassment in his tone.

"Why'd you say it like that?" Sapnap asked, lifting his head off Karl's shoulder. The look on Karl's face was enough to make him chuckle under his breath; Karl's expression could be summarized in one word- *displeased*.

"Yeah, 'baby' isn't the one." Karl shook his head, standing from the ground and wiping his hands on his jeans.

"What are you talking about?" Sapnap asked with another laugh, accepting the two hands Karl held out to him. Sapnap nearly pulled Karl to the ground as soon as he tried to stand.

"Hey- I'm here for moral support *not* physical support." Karl scoffed, dropping one of Sapnap's hands so he could rub his wrist.

"God." Sapnap muttered with a laugh, using his own knee for support to stand instead of pulling on Karl. "What do you mean 'baby' isn't the one?" Sapnap asked again, brushing stray blades of grass off his pants.

"You could fill an entire dictionary with all the sweet things you call me. I want to have at least *one* name that I can call you." Karl rolled his eyes, letting go of Sapnap's other hand to assist brushing him off.

"What's wrong with baby? I mean, most the time I'm essentially just calling you baby." Sapnap shrugged, another yawn escaping him in the middle of his sentence. Karl shook his head, disagreeing with Sapnap's answer.

"You call me things that are beautiful, things that take you back to happier times, pet names said in the language you grew up with. I... I don't want to call you any generic '*babe*' or '*baby*' or whatever.

I want to call you something that'll make you feel as special as I do when you call me names in Greek." Karl gave a much more detailed and heartfelt explanation than Sapnap's half-awake mind was ready for.

"You can make me flustered when you call me a *moron* in a certain tone." Sapnap said, earning an unexpected laugh from Karl. "I'm being serious, really. I don't care what you call me, as long as you sound happy when you say it." Sapnap continued, opening the driver's door for Karl.

"Does that mean I can call you Nick?" Karl asked, with a mischievous grin on his face, like he was waiting for the opportunity to lighten the conversation after his previous heartfelt response.

"Not a chance." Sapnap tried to mask his smile with a scoff, gently pushing on Karl's chest so he would sit. Karl fell back into his seat with a laugh, pushing Sapnap away so he could shut the door.

Sapnap made his way around to the passenger's side, leaning the seat back before he even put his seatbelt on.

Karl tapped Sapnap's thigh a few times, clearing trying to keep him awake. Sapnap grabbed Karl's hand with an annoyed grumble, holding it flat against his leg until Karl stopped squirming. Restless fingers settled, weaving together, and Sapnap found himself spinning the ring on Karl's pointer finger up until the moment he fell asleep.

"Honey, we're home."

Sapnap woke up, his first deep breath ending with a laugh. He opened his eyes to see Karl already grimacing and shaking his head 'no'.

"I'm vetoing 'honey'." Sapnap laughed, tugging Karl's hand up to his lips, kissing the back of it.

"I'm sorry, I love you and this cute little pet name journey you're taking, but I'd like '*honey*' to only be what the old ladies at church call me." Sapnap explained, kissing Karl's hand again.

"If I can't call you things old ladies call you, that eliminates half the pet names I know! Honey, sweetie, sweetheart-"

"Good, it means you can start weeding out the *bad* pet names." Sapnap interrupted with another laugh. He desperately tried to reach back out and grab onto Karl's hand, but Karl successfully held it against his chest, preventing Sapnap from getting his way.

"Seriously, just call me Sap like you always do. You already have a nickname for me, καρδιά μου (Greek to English translation: my heart)." Sapnap said with a smile, trailing his hand up Karl's arm so he could slowly pry Karl's hand away from his chest.

"My... love?" Karl questioned.

"My heart." Sapnap corrected, his lips curling into a smile. He let out a laugh when Karl scoffed, slumping down in the driver's seat.

"This is exactly what I mean! You have a million-"

"I meant it when I said don't care what I'm called, as long as it's *you* saying it. Even if it's baby or *sweetheart* or, god, I don't know, pumpkin... pie?" Sapnap tried to list off whatever names came to mind, successfully making Karl laugh.

"Your brain is broken." Karl smiled, tapping the side of Sapnap's head a couple times. Whether it was a silent apology or just habit, Karl began twirling the few curls that exceeded the length of

Sapnap's hat.

"It's not broken, just... off." Sapnap tried to refute, quickly giving up on trying to talk anymore. Instead, Sapnap leaned his head forward and closed his eyes, enjoying the feeling of Karl's fingers running through his hair.

"We've been sitting in the car for over fifteen minutes, let's go inside alr-"

Karl cut himself off in the middle of his sentence, causing Sapnap to squint one eye open. Karl's face was almost impossible to read. There were hints of confusion, concern, and a *lot* of worry.

Overall, Karl's face reminded Sapnap of the feeling when you get to your destination and finally remember what you *knew* you left behind.

"What's that face for? Did we forget something in-"

Sapnap cut himself off too, his face instantly matching Karl's expression. His eyes scanned away from Karl's face and through the windshield of his car. The house was lit in a few areas, just the lights they always left on, even if no one was home.

But they both knew that wasn't the case, that the house *wasn't* vacant.

"Oh my god." Sapnap mumbled under his breath.

"You never told Dream, did you?" Karl asked. Sapnap slowly adjusted his gaze back to Karl, shaking his head 'no'.

"I didn't even tell him I was leaving early or that you were with me. Fuck, let alone the fact-"

"That you're gay and I'm your boyfriend?" Karl took the words right out of Sapnap's mouth. Hearing Karl be the one to say it, especially so *bluntly*, was hilarious to Sapnap's sleep deprived mind for some reason.

Karl stared at Sapnap with a tinge of amusement and questioning on his face, like he had no idea why this was so funny to Sapnap but he was going to let him ride out his laughter anyway.

"Sorry, I don't know why that- sorry." Sapnap finally came down from his laughter, the car suddenly silent. He looked back over to Karl, watching Karl biting back his own laughter. It wasn't until a small raspberry sound escaped Karl that Sapnap knew it was over for both of them.

The noise was enough to cause them both to burst into laughter this time, completely leaning over the center console to rest on each other's shoulders. Again, there wasn't anything necessarily funny about the situation, but Sapnap and Karl could turn anything into a joke they'd cry laughing at.

"Okay, okay, we really need to go inside. It's late." Sapnap was the first to calm down, rubbing his cheeks to help with the soreness from smiling for so long.

"How are we going to do this?" Karl asked as soon as his last few giggles were out of his system. He turned off the car, making all the interior lights turn on.

"Without me being at home the last few days, I'm sure Dream and George synced their sleep schedules again. He always goes to bed super early when they're synced, so he's probably already out. We'll just have to tell him in the morning." Sapnap shrugged, reaching over and pushing a few hairs out of Karl's face. His cheeks were still a bit rosy from laughing so hard. Sapnap thought pink was a lovely color on Karl's cheeks.

"Yeah, okay." Karl answered once Sapnap pulled his hand away, the glee no longer present on his face.

"Or we could, uh, *not*? Your room here still isn't all the way done, so he wouldn't think twice about you sleeping with me. Honestly, even if it *was*, he still probably wouldn't." Sapnap pitched, turning his head to the side.

"No, we can tell him." Karl disagreed, shaking his head.

"But do you *want* to tell him? I mean, we didn't even tell my family because it was what *you* wanted. You just wanted to do what you thought was best for Andrew." Sapnap said slowly, unsure if he should even be mentioning what happened back in Texas, seeing that it was far from a fond memory for either of them.

"I know." Karl answered, slowly turning his head towards Sapnap. "I *think* I want to tell him. It's just... telling Dream feels like the beginning of telling everyone- which is *fine*! It's also just a bit overwhelming, I guess." Karl rambled towards the end, covering his face with one hand.

"We can wait a bit. Since you weren't originally planning on going back to North Carolina for a few more days, we can always tell him right before you leave or something. This is *my* home, not my parents. We can cuddle and hold hands and act how we always do and it's nothing that would make Dream bat an eye." Sapnap answered, doing his best to sound encouraging.

He especially didn't want Karl to feel pressured into telling Dream because, well, he wasn't sure if *he* even wanted to tell Dream. Telling his family was one thing- it was an in and out type situation. If Dream reacted poorly, or even just not how Sapnap hoped he'd react, that could change everything.

Where he lived, his job, his friends- everything could disappear if that 1% 'what if' in the back of his mind actually came true. The 1% chance that his friends won't accept him for who he is, for who he loves.

"Honestly, I kind of forgot we don't need to hide around the house anymore. It's crazy how much a few days can rewire your brain for a bit." Karl let out a laugh, seeming to relax for the first time since the conversation began.

"Part of me is going to miss it." Sapnap said with a sheepish smile, shrugging at the confused look on Karl's face.

"Sneaking is kind of fun, I don't know. It's childish and whatever, yeah, but I never got to do that stuff with someone I actually liked before." Sapnap explained, rolling his eyes and looking away to disguise his blush.

"We'll still have to sneak kisses." Karl said after a second of deliberation.

"Maybe we should do a sneaky kiss test-run, you know, since we're probably out of practice." Sapnap suggested, turning back to give Karl a grin.

"*Moron*." Karl shook his head, leaning in nonetheless.

"Don't you mean *darling* or *babe* or-"

Karl cut Sapnap off with a kiss, each of them laughing against each other's lips for the first few seconds. This type of kiss was one that Sapnap had no idea he would love so much. Lazy kisses that would break and then resume seconds later. Whenever they kissed like this, Karl would always

peck his lips three times before pulling away for the final time.

"Maybe I should just call you *my* moron, you know, since we're so possessive in this relationship." Karl said snidely, opening his door and scurrying out of the car before Sapnap could reach out and grab him.

"You're dead, you're *literally*-"

"Shhh!" Karl cut off Sapnap, holding out his arms in self defense when Sapnap chased after him. Sapnap pulled Karl back by his waist, lifting him in the air.

"Don't shush me on my own property." Sapnap said, purposefully adding in a dash of his Texan accent. He swung Karl around a couple times until he stopped laughing, finally setting him down.

"Whatever you say, *my* moron." Karl answered, his grin illuminated by the brightly lit moon in the sky.

"That's it, I'm vetoing 'my moron'." Sapnap scoffed. He knew that he couldn't hide the smile on his face and he was all too aware that Karl knew that fact too.

"Oh come on, how many vetoes do you get? What happened to '*call me whatever you want, as long as it's you saying it, I'm as happy as a-*'"

As soon as Karl started imitating him, using a horrendous southern accent, Sapnap reached out and pulled Karl backwards by his waist once again, this time tickling him to get him to stop talking.

"Oh? What was that? I'm having trouble hearing you!" Sapnap asked, playing dumb, while he continued to tickle and poke Karl's sides.

"Uncle! *Uncle!*" Karl cried out, trying to catch his breath through his last few laughs once Sapnap stopped tickling him.

"Is that, like, daddy but-"

"You're *nasty*." Karl interrupted, pushing himself away from Sapnap before he could even finish his joke. Sapnap jogged to catch back up to Karl, sliding his hand into Karl's, as they approached the front gate.

"Just call me baby." Sapnap rolled his eyes, pulling up both their hands to put air quotes around the word *baby*.

Instead of answering, Karl just made a pouting face, clearly not satisfied with the proposition. Sapnap tried to hide his smile, opening the gate for Karl.

He had no idea Karl would become so fixed on a small detail, like a pet name. As much as Sapnap had teased and claimed to veto all of the names Karl had tried out, he'd be lying if he said hearing Karl call him *any* pet name didn't make his heart race.

Even as they fell into a comfortable silence, strolling slowly through the warm spring air, Sapnap realized that his heart rate hadn't actually slowed down. He could still feel his heart beating in his chest, it only seemed to pump harder with each step towards the house.

"Something wrong?" Karl asked, turning around when Sapnap began to fall behind.

"I don't know." Sapnap answered honestly, rubbing his chest. Karl took one look at him before

taking his hand out of Sapnap's, holding Sapnap's face in his hands.

"*You're* not ready to tell Dream." Karl said, looking Sapnap in the eyes until he nodded. "We don't have to tell him. I don't just mean not tell him right away, I mean at *all*." Karl said softly, brushing his thumbs over Sapnap's cheeks.

"Dream's like a brother to me- he should know." Sapnap shook his head slightly, wishing the feeling of dread that weighed heavily in his chest would pass.

"He can know when you're ready for him to know. That just happens to not be right now." Karl shrugged, doing his best to comfort Sapnap. Instead of answering, Sapnap took a step forward to kiss Karl's cheek, then resting his forehead on Karl's shoulder.

"Can I ask if Dream has ever said or done anything that makes you think he wouldn't, I don't know, be supportive?" Karl asked, slowly wrapping his arms around Sapnap, his hands moving in soothing circles over his back.

"You say that like Dream is straight or something, like I'm afraid he's homophobic." Sapnap said with a small scoff, actually letting out a laugh under his breath.

"Exactly- I guess that's why I'm confused. Don't get me wrong, if you're not ready, then you're not ready and there's nothing wrong with that. I just want to understand what's holding you back." Karl explained. Sapnap thought it was endearing how Karl would occasionally stop rubbing circles on his back so he could talk with his hands, despite neither of them being able to see it.

"It's not that I think Dream would be mad if he found out I'm gay. It's more like... he might be upset that I hid it from him for so long. He came out to me when we were both still teenagers- way before he ever came out publicly. I've had countless opportunities to tell him but I always lied instead. Dream has *never* betrayed my trust, but I still couldn't..." Sapnap trailed off, only making himself feel guilty the more he thought about it.

"You're thinking about this in black and white. Just because Dream came out to you doesn't mean you had to do the same. I think it's safe for me to assume this isn't as much about not trusting Dream as it is about you not wanting things to change." Karl held Sapnap's face tighter in his hands, preventing him from continuing to shake his head.

"What if he resents me for not telling him sooner? What if he blames himself and thinks I didn't trust him or-"

"What if he's proud of you for doing something that scares you? What if he's just *happy* for us?" Karl interrupted, forcing Sapnap to see there were more potential outcomes than just the bad ones. He also knew that Karl's 'what ifs' were much closer to reality than his.

"Happy for *us*?" Sapnap questioned after a second. "Just because I'm coming out to him doesn't mean you have to also. Telling him I'm gay and telling him we're in a relationship can be totally separate conversations."

"They *could* be, but there's not much of a point. You don't have to do scary things alone anymore." Karl smiled. It was a gentle kind of smile. It wasn't coming from a place of overt joy or because anything was funny. It was a smile of contentment, of comfort. It was a smile that made Sapnap realize how at peace Karl was with all of this now.

"Is this you pushing yourself out of your comfort zone again, because you think it's what's best for me?" Sapnap asked, squinting his eyes slightly, as though he were inspecting Karl.

"Honestly? Maybe a little. *But* I think we're to a point where what's best for you might also be what's best for me. Dream, even though I've known him for a *significantly* less amount of time than you, has really become a great friend to me. Out of all our friends, I think I'd feel most comfortable with telling Dream first. More specifically, us telling him together." Karl answered with the same content smile on his face.

"Do you think he's going to freak? Like, not even believe us for a while because he'll think we're fucking with him or something?" Sapnap asked, a smile returning to his own face.

"Nah, once he sees for himself in person how you *gawk* at me, he'll know it's real." Karl teased, pinching Sapnap's cheek before pulling away hurriedly.

Based on the way Karl skipped a few steps ahead, Sapnap figured that Karl thought he would chase and tickle him again. Instead, Sapnap followed behind slowly, keeping one hand extended out to Karl.

Karl stopped his pace, allowing Sapnap to catch up. They took turns squeezing each other's hands, attempting to send little messages, until they made their way to the front door.

"*Oh.*" Sapnap mumbled, pulling his keys out of his pocket slowly. "You haven't seen the house yet, have you?" He asked almost rhetorically.

"Only over FaceTime. This is also going to be my first time seeing Dream *not* through a camera—hence the 'seeing us in person' comment." Karl shrugged, beginning to bounce a bit in place. Sapnap wasn't sure if it was his nerves beginning to settle in or if the night air had cooled too much for Karl's liking.

"He's bigger than you think." Sapnap said with a smile, unlocking the front door.

"Is he *actually* that tall? Or are you just—" Karl cut himself off when Sapnap turned around to glare at him, knowing the next words out of his mouth were going to have something to do with the way he used to *slightly* exaggerate his own height.

"Okay, but seriously. Yeah, he *is* tall, but he's also pretty broad too." Sapnap shrugged, closing the front door behind Karl once they were both inside. Like he suspected, the light in the front hall was left on, but everything else was off. Dream was definitely already in bed.

"I saw your guys' Halloween photos, I have a decent understanding of what he looks like." Karl scoffed, slipping off his shoes and stepping ahead of Sapnap.

"Well?" Sapnap asked, feeling a small sense of pride bubble up in his chest from watching Karl walk around the room with his mouth slightly ajar, taking everything in.

"It looks so much, I don't know, *bigger* than it did over FaceTime." Karl said with a laugh, making Sapnap pause in his tracks.

"Funny how a camera never does it justice when it comes to showing accurate proportions." Sapnap said snidely, crossing his arms. Karl turned to him with his signature confused pout before he tied their conversations together, realizing he literally just proved Sapnap right.

"Okay, fine, whatever—" Karl rolled his eyes, trying to hide his smile.

"*Okay, fine, whatever.*" Sapnap mocked, grabbing Karl's hand and pulling him in the opposite direction. "My room is on this side of the house. I'll give you the grand tour tomorrow. I don't want to wake him up." Sapnap insisted, continuing to tug on Karl's arm when he resisted Sapnap's pull.

"What happened to wanting to be sneaky?" Karl asked, finally allowing Sapnap to lead him in the right direction.

"It's not *sneaking* if he's asleep. Plus, if the options are kissing you in my bed or kissing you in a random linens closet, my bed is going to win every time." Sapnap laughed with a shrug, heading up the stairs.

"Well, I do suppose that would be the better option." Karl answered reluctantly, catching up to stand side by side with Sapnap, tracing his hand along all the surfaces they passed.

"Plus, I need my human ice cube to cool me down. I was gone for less than a week and I already forgot how muggy Florida is." Sapnap groaned, pushing open his bedroom door to see the sea of clothes he left spread across the floor. He forgot that he had made such a mess while packing.

"Oh, wow." Karl said from his place directly behind Sapnap in the doorway. He instantly stepped away from Karl's side, beginning to pick up all the clothes that scattered his floor.

"Fuck, sorry. I was so late and left in such a hurry that I didn't even think to clean up and I-"

"Leave it." Karl interrupted, tugging on Sapnap's arm so he would stand up straight.

"αγάπη μου (Greek to English translation: my love), it'll only take me a minute. Let me at least get them off the floor." Sapnap insisted, kissing the back of Karl's hand as a bargaining tactic.

"No, really, leave it. I like when you're a little messy. It makes it feel like we're still on a trip together." Karl shook his head, the whine in his voice coming out almost like a plea. Sapnap stood back up, tossing the clothes in his arms into at least a somewhat less cluttered pile.

"Why would my room being a mess make you feel like we're still on a trip?" Sapnap asked, allowing Karl to lead him towards his bed.

"Because you *always* have to be neat and organized and orderly and-"

"Get on with it." Sapnap interrupted with a dry laugh. Karl let go of Sapnap's hand, grabbing the bottom of his t-shirt instead, and lifting it over Sapnap's head.

"The only time you're *not* all those things is when you're traveling. You have this secret messy side to you that comes out when you're on a trip. So, leave the clothes on the floor for a few more hours and let me pretend this is the last night of our little adventure together." Karl said with a smile, purposefully tossing Sapnap's dirty shirt *away* from the neat pile he had made.

"Only *you* would romanticize *clutter*." Sapnap laughed, grabbing Karl by the waist and pushing him on the bed. Karl toppled over with a lackluster thud and a mixture between a laugh and a groan.

Sapnap headed towards his bathroom, Karl following closely behind once he pulled himself back out of bed. He grabbed a spare toothbrush for Karl, seeing that they didn't bother bringing in their bags from the car.

They brushed their teeth in primarily silence, occasionally bumping into each other's sides and making the other laugh. Karl was the first to leave the bathroom, heading straight back into Sapnap's bed.

"Love, I thought you agreed you were going to leave it?" Karl asked through a sigh, tracking Sapnap as he walked back over to the mess in front of his closet. Sapnap froze for a moment,

debating whether or not he should react to the new pet name Karl was trying out.

"I *am* leaving it, don't worry. I'm just grabbing us different clothes to sleep in. You're sorely mistaken if you think I'm going to let you sleep in my bed while wearing- *what?*" Sapnap cut himself off, turning around to see Karl staring at him with his nose scrunched up.

"I don't like it." Karl stated with no further explanation.

"What? That I won't let you wear your dirty clothes to sleep in my bed?" Sapnap asked sarcastically, slipping into a fresh pair of boxers and sweatpants, before grabbing clean clothes for Karl to change into.

"No- well, *yes*, but I meant 'love'. It's definitely better than the other ones I've tried, but it's still not what I *want*." Karl groaned, no mixture of a laugh in it this time. Karl let himself fall onto his back, staring at the ceiling with his arms stretched out.

"Okay, *μωρό μου* (Greek to English translation: my baby), we're settling this right here, right now." Sapnap sighed, tossing the pajamas he picked out for Karl on the bed, reaching out and grabbing both of Karl's wrists to pull him into a sitting position.

"Figuring out what exactly?" Karl complained, beginning to get changed into the clothes Sapnap brought, while Sapnap climbed beside him in bed.

"Figuring out what you want to call me. I love everything and anything. Babe, baby, love, handsome, *all* of it. Hearing you say those, knowing it's not a bit for the viewers or two friends joking around, it makes me *incredibly* happy. For fuck's sake, you could call me *pookie bear* and I'd still smile like an idiot." Sapnap said with a laugh, holding his arms open for Karl to lay with him, once he was finished changing.

"Is this you asking me to call you *pookie bear*?" Karl asked suspiciously, lowering himself onto Sapnap's chest, but not without giving him a sideways glance first.

"This is me saying I don't care what you call me, so let's get what *you* want to call me decided, like, *right now*." Sapnap shook his head, pulling Karl to lay flat on his chest. Despite seeming fairly awake before, Karl seemed to settle into his position quickly.

"How do we do that? Google 'what do I call my boyfriend that isn't cringe' or something?" Karl asked with a scoff, beginning to do his nightly routine of drawing small shapes onto Sapnap's chest with his finger.

"We'll cross the 'google-bridge' when we get there." Sapnap laughed. "Okay, what's your *favorite* thing that I call you in Greek. Well, favorite other than my baby, since we've established you don't like 'baby' in English." Sapnap asked, running his fingers through Karl's hair.

"Why?" Karl asked, leaning his head back to look at Sapnap briefly, quickly resettling into his previous position.

"*Because* if it's something you like being called, maybe you'll like calling me that too. Or, I don't know, it'll help you think of a similar pet name to try out." Sapnap explained. "So, which is your favorite?" He asked again.

Karl remained silent and Sapnap guessed he was probably taking his time to think over his answer to the question. He found himself focusing more on the shapes Karl was drawing onto his chest. Sometimes Karl would write words or phrases- '*i <3 u*', '*cutie*', '*moron*' and some other things.

It felt like Karl was drawing five loops, a circle in the middle of them, and then a straight line at the bottom.

"Did you just draw a flower?" Sapnap asked. Karl nodded against his chest, drawing the same shape again. "So that's your favorite then? λουλούδι μου (Greek to English translation: my flower)?" Sapnap asked again, tilting his head to the side to look at Karl.

"I don't know. I think I like that one because you always seem the happiest when you call me your flower." Karl answered through a yawn, leaning his head back so he could look at Sapnap as well.

"Sleep on it, yeah?" Sapnap suggested, feeling his eyes fighting to stay open.

"Okay." Karl agreed, stretching his neck as far forward as he could, straining to give Sapnap a kiss. Sapnap let out a light laugh under his breath, leaning forward the rest of the way to connect their lips.

"I love you." Karl mumbled just after pulling away, his lips still practically pressed against Sapnap's.

"I love you." Sapnap said back, wrapping one arm around Karl's waist before rolling on his side, keeping Karl pulled to his chest, making it so they were in a more comfortable position to continue kissing.

Karl smiled against Sapnap's lips, resting both his hands on Sapnap's chest. The cool temperature of Karl's hands always made goosebumps dance over Sapnap's skin, reminding him of just how well they seemed to balance each other out.

That was how they both fell asleep; wrapped in each other's arms, lips close enough to peck whenever they mustered up the strength, and legs woven together between the folds of cotton sheets.

Chapter End Notes

ahhh, the end is so close, just a couple more chapters left to go :) such a bittersweet feeling! thanks so much for sticking around <3

And the universe said I love you

Chapter Summary

Sapnap and Karl are met with a surprise guest in the morning

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The night passed by in phases. Sapnap found himself waking up about once an hour, the same as he had during their stay in Texas as well. He hadn't told Karl this, not wanting to make him worry about anything else, but he hadn't been able to shake the nightmares being 'home' gave him.

Even when he was lying next to Karl, holding him to his chest, and feeling as *physically* safe as ever, his mind still seemed to be vulnerable.

He dreamt of the all too familiar look in his dad's eyes, of tears rolling down Jen's cheeks, of his brothers feeling abandoned by him once again. There was something so eerily realistic about his nightmares. They never failed to shake him to his core.

If there was a bright side to the situation, it was that the nightmares never lasted for too long. Only about an hour of real time would pass before Sapnap would wake in a cold sweat.

It brought him peace when he woke up to Karl beside him each time. Occasionally, Karl would wake up enough to ask Sapnap if he was okay. Knowing Karl was there, that *this* was his new reality, it made going back to sleep a less daunting task, even if he knew the nightmares were waiting for him.

The sun had already started to rise by the time Sapnap fell asleep for the final time, just barely lighting his room in warm shadows.

The next time Sapnap woke up, the air smelled of coffee and sugar, with the gentle sound of his shower running in the distance. He rolled over, lazily searching for Karl, seeing that his mind was too tired to make the connection between Karl's whereabouts and the steam flowing into his room through the open bathroom door.

Slightly burnt smelling coffee was what Sapnap ended up focusing on. It was a scent he had never smelled inside their house before. Neither he nor Dream were fans of coffee, so brewing it themselves hadn't happened. Sapnap didn't even realize Dream's old coffee pot survived their last move.

The gentle hush of the showers stream came to a halt with a squeak. Sapnap rolled onto his back, using his hands to shield his eyes from the sun pouring in. The sun was still low in the sky, meaning it was far earlier than Sapnap had hoped he and Karl would be getting up.

By the time Sapnap's eyes adjusted to the brightness, Karl emerged from the bathroom. He was dressed in a simple pair of black jeans and a tan polo, with a towel draped over his arm.

"You're awake." Karl said with a smile, once he looked up from his phone. Sapnap nodded his head, letting out a yawn instead of answering. He held his arms up in the air, signaling he wanted

Karl to return to bed.

Shuffling feet made their way across his carpeted room, making their way towards him. The second Karl's hands trailed over Sapnap's bare chest, he knew he had made a terrible mistake.

"Wait--"

Sapnap couldn't even finish his plea before Karl fell directly on top of him, shaking out his wet hair in Sapnap's face. He was far too tired to fight, so he quickly succumbed to the situation.

"Good morning." Karl's greeting was cavity sweet, followed by a series of kisses he laid across Sapnap's cheek. Sapnap had a feeling this was as close to an apology as he was going to get, which wasn't a bad thing in the slightest.

"Did you dig out our coffee pot?" Sapnap asked through a grumble, flicking a few strings of Karl's wet hair out of his face. Before Karl could respond, Sapnap leaned forward to kiss him. "And good morning." He finished, pecking Karl's lips one more time before pulling away.

"No, it must be Dream. He went to bed pretty early, I wouldn't be shocked if he's up." Karl shrugged, standing back up.

"I'm not surprised he's awake- I'm surprised he's making coffee. He hates it more than I do." Sapnap explained, sitting up in bed and watching Karl adjust his hair in the mirror.

"Maybe his mom's here? You said she visits a lot." Karl pitched, leaning to the side so he could see Sapnap through the mirror. Sapnap, as much as he didn't want to, pulled himself out of bed. He walked to Karl first, kissing the back of his neck and running his hand across the small of Karl's back.

Sapnap made his way to his window, pushing the blinds down enough to clear his view of the driveway. His and Dream's cars were the only ones in the driveway. Whenever Dream's mom would visit, she always parked right in front of the gate.

"She doesn't drink coffee either." Sapnap said quietly, rubbing his face. "If anyone else *is* here, they don't have a car. Driveway is empty." Sapnap shrugged, heading back over to Karl. He let out an audible whine when Karl pressed his hand against his chest, keeping him an arm's length away.

"Go take a shower, stinky." Karl shook his head, pushing Sapnap back towards the bathroom.

"Is that my new nickname? *Stinky*?" Sapnap asked sarcastically, grabbing the towel Karl had draped over the back of his desk chair.

"Only when it's true." Karl teased, grinning at Sapnap. Sapnap rolled his eyes at Karl's response, heading into the bathroom. The walls clung to the residual steam from Karl's shower and the mirrors were still fogged over.

"Hang out with me." Sapnap called out, starting up the shower's stream again. When he turned around, Karl was peering around the doorframe, looking at him with one eyebrow raised.

"Oh, come on. Just sit in here and talk to me while I shower." Sapnap said over his shoulder, testing the water temperature with his hand.

"Fine, let me grab my phone." Karl sighed, heading back into his room. Sapnap used this time to get into the shower. As soon as he was under the shower's stream, he heard Karl reenter the room. He peeked around the curtain, smiling when he saw Karl sitting on the sink counter.

“How’d you sleep?” Sapnap asked, closing the curtain again and beginning his shower routine.

“I get the best sleep when I’m with you. You, like, *secrete* melatonin or something.” Karl joked. Sapnap looked around the curtain again, catching Karl drawing shapes into condensation covered mirror.

“Something like that.” Sapnap said quietly with a smile, rinsing the shampoo out of his hair. He thought back fondly to that brief conversation he had with Chris, when he found out that Karl truly *does* get his best sleep with they're together.

“Jesus, how loud does Dream’s speakerphone go?” Karl asked with a laugh, jumping off the counter and standing in the doorway. Sapnap was almost done with his shower at this point, trying to be as quick as his tired limbs would allow.

“What are you talking about, μωρό μου (Greek to English translation: my baby)?” Sapnap asked once he turned off the shower, grabbing his towel and wrapping it around his waist.

“I’m, like 99% sure he’s on the phone with George. I swear I can hear his laugh every- there it is again!” Karl switched trains of thought in the middle of his sentence. Sapnap watched Karl head back into his bedroom as he was stepping out.

“Dream may wake up early, but he *never* goes outside. He probably didn’t see my car in the driveway, so he has no idea we’re back. Maybe he has his phone set up through the living room speakers or something.” Sapnap shrugged.

He ruffled Karl’s half-dry hair as he stepped around him, grabbing some random clothes from his dresser. It wasn’t until Sapnap heard the laugh for himself that he paused what he was doing. Dream and George were laughing and talking over each other in a way that didn’t account for the second or two delay phone calls had.

“Is George... *here*?” Karl asked, watching Sapnap put a hoodie over his t-shirt, already having put on a pair of black sweatshorts.

“He said he wasn’t coming until his visa was approved- he didn’t want to risk fucking it up by visiting.” Sapnap shook his head, his brows still furrowed.

“What are the chances George *did* get his visa?” Karl asked, his eyes tracking Sapnap walk across his bedroom.

“And not... tell me?” Sapnap asked, more so as a question to the universe and less so to Karl. “If he got his visa, he’d tell me, right?” Sapnap asked, looking to Karl for an answer this time.

Another wave of far off laughter made its way into Sapnap’s room, filling the space between them. Sapnap found himself drawn to it, leaving his room with wet hair dripping. Karl scrambled to follow him, reaching forward and pulling him back by his arm.

“Are you okay?” Karl asked once Sapnap stopped walking for the stairs.

Truthfully, he *wasn’t* okay. Even just being a few feet closer, he was positive that George’s voice wasn’t being broadcast through a speaker- he was there, in *their* house. The house they had been building for a year, waiting restlessly for George to get his visa.

“Just fine.” Sapnap answered instead, looking away from Karl before he spoke. Even though everything seemed to confirm that George was there, *in person*, Sapnap didn’t want to believe it. He wanted to go downstairs and see that Dream just had his laptop on the counter, with George in a

TeamSpeak call with him.

“Please don’t make me ask for you to be honest.” Karl said quietly, his grip on the sleeve of Sapnap’s hoodie tightening when Sapnap tried to turn for the stairwell again. He paused, letting out a deep breath and feeling some of the tension in his shoulders relax.

“George getting his visa is something we’ve all been waiting on for months. I’m the one who went and got my passport the day after George said he was depressed in England. I get that they’ve always had a bond that was, I don’t know, *different* from how they are with me. But I didn’t think that meant I’d get left out of *huge* things like George getting his visa- let alone the fact he’s actually here, *in* the US!” Sapnap whispered with urgency, turning to face Karl.

“Do you think Dream or George have ever done anything to intentionally hurt you? To make you feel excluded?” Karl asked, letting go of Sapnap’s sleeve now that he wasn’t trying to leave the conversation.

“*No*, but-”

“What other reasons could they have to not have shared that information with you?” Karl interrupted, doing his best to keep Sapnap on the right track.

“I don’t know. Because... I was in Texas.” Sapnap shrugged, looking away from Karl again.

“You were in Texas, which is a place you dreaded going- but you were pushing through anyway. If they told you, one of two things would’ve happened. One, you’d be miserable in Texas, knowing they were here together. Or, two, you would have used it as an excuse to leave early. Which, now that I’ve seen it for myself, wouldn’t have been a *bad* thing, but Dream thought you were really pushing yourself to make it through this week.” Karl offered, stepping to the side to be in Sapnap’s vision again.

Sapnap sighed, stepping forward to rest his forehead on Karl’s shoulder. No matter how much sense it made, it didn’t change the way he *felt*. Emotion and reason work together, but they don’t always work in the same direction.

“It’s not *fair*.” Sapnap mumbled, loosely wrapping his arms around Karl’s waist. Karl had already laid his arms over Sapnap’s shoulders, flicking around a few of his wet curls.

“Everyone keeps secrets. With Dream and George, I think it’s safe to assume they only had your best interest in mind when they chose to hold off on telling you.” Karl said quietly, leaning away enough to kiss the side of Sapnap’s head.

“I guess.” Sapnap mumbled at the same volume, already finding his adrenaline beginning to fade.

“Who knows, maybe they were going to surprise you when you got back. Texas was going to be a hard trip, so what would’ve been better than coming home to both your best friends in one house?” Karl pitched, continuing to lean away so Sapnap would look at him again.

“Having all three in one house.” Sapnap answered, finally standing up straight again so he could look Karl in the eyes. Once Karl realized what Sapnap was saying, the flush of his cheeks contrasted with the way he rolled his eyes.

“You’re a moron.” Karl muttered, attempting to shoo away the kisses Sapnap was peppering down his cheek and across his jaw.

“I think moron is the pet name.” Sapnap smiled. It felt quite fitting that his names for Karl were

deep and beautiful, whereas Karl just enjoyed insulting him.

“Well, *sorry*, this didn’t seem like a good time to call you a flower or whatever.” Karl grumbled, giving in to Sapnap’s kisses, allowing himself to be pulled back against his chest.

“Best of both worlds, call me whatever the ugliest flower is. Boom, the perfect insult slash pet name, while still being a little unique to us.” Sapnap smiled, turning Karl’s face towards his own. He kissed Karl’s lips in a way that started off as quick pecks to be annoying, but soon slowed into something much more comfortable.

“You’re being serious?” Karl asked, a muffled laugh escaping when Sapnap nodded enthusiastically. “Christ, how about I call you Rafflesia, hmm? World’s ugliest *and* stinkiest flower. It’s even red, too.” Karl shook his head, biting back a smile.

“Sounds kinda pretty. It also sounds like it could be an STD.” Sapnap shrugged, a smile growing on his face when Karl nearly choked on air at his response. It wasn’t until another wave of laughter came into earshot that Sapnap remembered what brought him and Karl to the top of the staircase.

“They must’ve had a *damn* good reason to not tell you. How about we go find out what it was?” Karl offered once he noticed Sapnap was staring at the stairs again. Sapnap nodded, reaching back and holding Karl’s hand in his own, bringing it to his lips.

“Σε αγαπώ (Greek to English translation: I love you).” Sapnap mumbled, his lips grazing over the back of Karl’s hand.

“I love you too, my stinky, ugly flower.” Karl smiled and Sapnap dropped his hand, holding back a laugh when he made his way down the first few steps. Karl was only a stride behind him, drumming on his shoulders with each step.

Dream and George’s voices grew, as did the smell of coffee and French toast, the closer Sapnap and Karl got to the kitchen. Their voices went from far off and undecipherable to a nearly clear conversation.

“I still feel, I don’t know, *weird* about not saying anything.”

Sapnap paused, causing Karl to bump into his back. He knew he shouldn’t eavesdrop, but Karl *did* say they could find out the reason they would hide the visa news from him.

“I told you, he would’ve rushed back here. This is the first time he’s gone to Texas since we started living together.”

Karl poked Sapnap sharply in the back upon overhearing Dream’s response, his silent *I told you so*. Sapnap held out his hand, preventing Karl from walking around him, once George started to answer.

“We could’ve said I got the call but the papers wouldn’t be here for a few days or something, that way-”

“That way we could lie to his face? You can disagree with me on this, but I still think a lie by omission is less bad than *that*.” Dream interrupted. Despite Sapnap feeling like there should’ve been some type of seriousness to what Dream said, his words were light, a laugh filtered between them.

“Can you just... let me have a conscience? He’s our best friend and we’re already hiding enough from him.” George laughed as well.

Sapnap looked over his shoulder at Karl in what felt like slow motion. There was a perplexed look on Karl's face that seemed to mirror his own.

"But I like when-"

Just as Sapnap was stepping forward to turn the corner, Karl pulled him back, causing him to bump into the wall and make an audible thud. Clearly the noise was enough to grab Dream and George's attention.

"You heard that, right?"

George's voice was lowered to a whisper, just barely audible from where Sapnap and Karl were standing. Sapnap turned around to face Karl, waiting for some type of explanation as to why he didn't want to approach them yet.

"Stay here, babe. I'll go look." It was still a whisper, but Sapnap was *sure* what he heard Dream call George.

"Are you an idiot? You're not going *alone* to inspect a-"

"*Babe*?" Sapnap asked, turning the corner fully, not allowing Karl to hold him back this time.

What was waiting for him around the corner was the last thing Sapnap was expecting to see- which takes a lot, considering the way their entire friend group acts with one another. Calling someone '*babe*' was hardly incriminating amongst the four, but the sight before him sure was.

It seemed that Dream didn't recognize Sapnap's voice immediately and in some form of instinct had stepped forward to block George. Honestly, the only reason Sapnap even *knew* George was behind Dream was because he had his arms wrapped tightly around Dream's chest, clinging to his t-shirt and peeking over his shoulder.

"*Nick*?" Dream asked in disbelief. A sigh of relief followed, quickly replaced with a look of general panic, as he stepped away from George. This allowed Sapnap's gaze to land on George, standing there in all his glory, wearing nothing but Dream's Oklahoma Sooners jersey.

"The fuck..." Sapnap said under his breath, looking between his two best friends, each wearing pajamas and matching bed head.

"It's- it's not what it looks like, really! It-"

"Yeah, that's what you say when it's *exactly* what it looks like." Sapnap interrupted George, taking a step back. He looked behind him when he didn't run into Karl, seeing Karl still stood around the corner out of sight.

"Just hear us out-"

"Oh my god, is that a *hickey*? For fuck's sake, are you guys sixteen?" Sapnap interrupted, squinting his eyes as he stared at Dream's neck. He got all the confirmation he needed when Dream slapped his hand over his neck, attempting to cover what Sapnap had already discovered.

"Listen to us!" George called out, catching everyone's attention- including Karl, who was still hiding around the corner.

"Okay." George said through a sigh when the room was no longer filled with everyone talking over the other. "Clearly *this* wasn't how we wanted to have this conversation with you." George

continued, gesturing to the space between them.

“What exactly do you mean by ‘*this*’? The part where you got your visa got approved and you didn’t tell me or the part where you two are-”

“All of it.” Dream interrupted this time, burying his face in his hands. He dragged his hands down his face slowly, finally facing Sapnap.

“Look, I’m not m-”

“Do you have a black eye?” George asked, catching Sapnap off guard. Sapnap was used to the sight of his face at this point and seeing that his split lip had healed, he completely forgot about the residual bruising on his cheek.

“Wait, you’re home *early*- three days early.” Dream pointed out before Sapnap could begin to explain. “Holy shit, did something happen?” Dream asked, making his way across the kitchen towards Sapnap.

“I’m *fine*, we’re, uh, we’re not talking about-”

“How did you get hurt?” George asked, following closely behind Dream. It seemed like the conversation had taken a turn, with Sapnap being the new primary focus.

Sapnap took a glimpse at Karl, a look of distress on his face. Whatever direction this was going, it wasn’t something that Karl seemed ready to be a part of yet.

“It was my dad.” Sapnap spit out, causing Dream and George to freeze in their tracks. It seemed like there were a number of secrets coming out between them, and it wasn’t even noon.

As silence ensued, Sapnap looked to the side again, feeling a bit of comfort in just seeing Karl. He could tell Karl wanted to be near him, to *hug* him, knowing this was a sensitive topic.

“My dad hit me, so I left. Uh-” Sapnap couldn’t help but look over his shoulder again at Karl. He was relieved when Karl nodded and walked out from around the corner. “*We* left.” Sapnap corrected.

Karl made his way to Sapnap’s side, smiling sheepishly at the other two. It was pretty clear that they were as equally shocked to see Karl was there, as Karl was to see how they looked.

“Why did he hit you?” George asked.

“B- *George*.” Dream corrected, letting out a sigh. Sapnap and Karl exchanged glances before looking back at their friends. No matter how obvious it was and as unexpected as it may be, Sapnap couldn’t help but feel a sense of regret.

He and Karl had *just* discussed how they didn’t feel ready to tell Dream about their relationship. Now, regardless of if it was unintentional, Sapnap had taken away the opportunity for Dream and George to come out to them.

“Whatever, there’s no way to hide it now.” Dream sighed, reaching back for George. There was a look of clear hesitancy in George’s gaze. Even though Dream was extending his hand for George to hold, George just stepped forward slowly, allowing Dream to rest his hand on his back instead.

“We’re, well, not *together* but, uh, we’re-”

“You don’t have to explain, really. Just, talk to me about it when you’re ready.” Sapnap interjected. Dream seemed relieved to be cut off and George maintained his poker face at Dream’s side.

There was a heavy silence in the room, weighing everyone down. It wasn’t clear *who* should say anything next, let alone *what* they should say. Sapnap wanted to change the topic, but he knew the next item on the agenda was explaining his bruised face.

“I, uh, I think you’re burning something.” Karl said quietly, nodding his head towards the kitchen. George was the first to react, heading back in and turning off the burner. Dream made his way over to the window, opening it. There was hardly any smoke, but clearly they were thankful for the task.

“I’m going to change.” George said from his place in the kitchen, disappearing down the hall before anyone could respond. Dream watched him walk away with a pained expression, while Karl and Sapnap watched Dream.

“μωρό μου, can you give us a minute?” Sapnap said quietly to Karl. He was thankful that Dream didn’t know any Greek, so he could continue to call Karl pet names without jeopardizing their relationship. The feeling only lasted for a minute before the guilt set back in, when he remembered Dream didn’t share the same luxury.

“Of course, I’ll be in your room.” Karl answered with a nod, heading back in the direction they came. As Sapnap watched Karl ascend the staircase at the end of the hall, he could feel Dream watching him, the same way Sapnap watched him earlier.

“Sorry.” Sapnap started, making his way into the kitchen where Dream was still standing next to the open window.

“No, no- *I’m* sorry.” Dream shook his head, soon burying his face in his hands again. By the way he sighed and raked his fingers through his overgrown hair, Sapnap knew Dream was more distraught than he was willing to admit.

“I should’ve called- *I meant* to call. We just left in such a hurry, I don’t even think I remembered to grab half my stuff. Even so, I still should’ve called.” Sapnap explained, intentionally opening the opportunity for Dream to switch the subject.

“You know I’m not one to pry.” Dream started, finally looking back at Sapnap. “I’m not asking for details, I just want to know if you’re okay now.” Dream sighed, continuing to look anxiously around Sapnap’s face.

“You’re a great friend, Dream. You’re a *brother*.” Sapnap said slowly, only looking at Dream long enough to see the confusion set in. “You’re way too fucking nice. You’d never make me say anything I don’t want to, which I took comfort in for a long time. But I think it’s time I start trusting you the way I should’ve from the start.” Sapnap nodded, beginning to pace the length of the kitchen.

“Alright.” Dream answered after a minute of silence passed. Sapnap was relieved in a way- part of him was afraid Dream would give him more push back.

“Okay.” He said under his breath, shaking out his hands a few times before facing Dream. “The reason why we left early- why my dad did *this*.” Sapnap paused, gesturing to his face. As much as he wanted, *genuinely* wanted, to tell Dream everything, all the words seemed to get caught in his throat.

Sapnap let out a small laugh of frustration, like he couldn't believe he was having a harder time telling Dream he's gay than he did his dad. That was when it hit him.

How Dream viewed him was something that *mattered*.

Blurting it out to his dad and burning his bridges along the way didn't matter, because he held no value to how his dad viewed him. This was different- this was *Dream*.

Dream seemed to recognize the panic setting in on Sapnap's face, taking a step forward. Sapnap looked up just as Dream opened his mouth and he could already hear it- *'it's okay, we can talk about it later or-'*.

"It was because you told him you're gay, right?" Dream spoke, catching Sapnap off guard when the words he said didn't match the imaginary script he had written in his mind.

"You... you *know*? Since when?" Sapnap asked, half expecting this whole morning to be just another nightmare to wake up from.

"I don't know. Since you were fourteen? Maybe fifteen?" Dream shrugged, like that was the most casual information for him to have but never mentioned.

"*What*?" Sapnap asked in disbelief, trying to recall any memories from those years- trying to figure out how he could've outed himself without even knowing.

"You seem pretty shocked that I know." Dream said, stating the obvious.

"Well, maybe because the only reactions I've gotten to me coming out were either total shock or a fist in my face." Sapnap scoffed, regretting the words as soon as they left his mouth. "Sorry, I didn't- sorry." He sighed, walking over to lean against the counter.

"Don't apologize." Dream shook his head, moving across the kitchen to stand by Sapnap's side.

"You really knew this whole time and never said anything?" Sapnap asked, looking up at Dream.

"I wanted you to tell me when you were ready." He shrugged with a smile.

"Weren't you ever mad that I didn't tell you? Weren't you frustrated that you knew I was lying about it constantly?" Sapnap asked. There was an uptick in his heart rate when the content smile on Dream's face tightened into something strange.

"I mean, when we were younger, yeah. I wanted you to trust me and I didn't know what I did that made you *not* trust me. I never joked about our private conversations on stream, I educated myself and stopped using 'gay' as an insult, and as soon as I realized *I* wasn't straight- you were the first person I came out to." Dream laughed in a way that sounded sad, shaking his head.

"Fuck, I'm sorry. I *wanted* to tell you, I-"

"But then I realized that was selfish of me. I was trying to turn something that's about you into something about me. I didn't realize that until my older sister practically cornered me and forced me to come out to her. I could tell she didn't have bad intentions, that she genuinely thought if I told her it would be good for me, but it *wasn't*. She wanted me to tell her so it would confirm that she was right. *That's* when I realized I was doing the same thing to you, that I'd be taking away your right to choose. I'm the one who's sorry here." Dream cut off Sapnap, explaining the rest of his story.

“I don’t deserve a friend as- a *brother* as good as you.” Sapnap said with a smile, bumping his shoulder against Dream’s side. “You know, you didn’t actually explain how you figured it out.” Sapnap prompted, looking at Dream again.

“What? You don’t believe I just have good intuition?” Dream scoffed, raising an eyebrow. His stoic façade fell as soon as Sapnap squinted at him, like that was never an option in the first place.

“No.” Sapnap said flatly. Dream’s smile began to peek through and it made Sapnap feel a bit uneasy.

“When you get embarrassed, don’t say I didn’t offer you an out.” Dream shrugged, continuing before Sapnap could ask what he meant by that. “Let’s just say you weren’t always very, uh, *mindful* of your search history when you would screenshare on call.” Dream laughed.

Sapnap cringed and faced away, while Dream continued to laugh behind him. He was beginning to wish he believed Dream when he said it was just good intuition.

“Wait, why do you say that like it happened more than once?” Sapnap asked once Dream’s laughter came down. The second of silence that passed was telling enough, causing Sapnap to groan and Dream to laugh again.

“Happens to the best of us.” Dream said in a vain attempt to console Sapnap, tapping his shoulder a few times.

“Shut up.” Sapnap muttered, shrugging off Dream’s hand. He walked to the other side of the kitchen where the forgotten breakfast was still sitting. He grabbed a piece of bacon, taking a bite before facing Dream again.

“So, I actually did, um, want to talk to you about what you walked in on.” Dream mentioned and Sapnap began chewing more slowly. For some reason, he thought the conversation was over- that they each had their half-understandings and were content.

“Yeah?” Sapnap asked, nervously picking at the piece of burnt French toast that George pulled off the burner earlier.

“I want to make sure you know it doesn’t mean things are going to change- our friendships, the *dream team* house, all of it.” Dream did his best to sound reassuring, but Sapnap felt like Dream was trying to convince himself it was true too.

“I hate to be so forward, especially after our whole conversation, but what exactly *are* you guys? I mean, you specified earlier you two aren’t together, but, well.” Sapnap shrugged, only briefly looking at Dream throughout his question.

“I don’t know.” Dream answered, his tone rather unsure. “I know we aren’t in any kind of established relationship. But I *also* know that neither of us have been with anyone else in... a while.” Dream trailed off, which instantly caught Sapnap’s attention.

“How long is ‘a while’?” Sapnap asked, setting down the ripped pieces of bread to make air quotes with his fingers.

“You know, just a few, uh, months.” Dream said slowly, refusing to make eye contact with Sapnap.

“*Months*?” Sapnap repeated, leaning to the side, trying to put himself in Dream’s line of vision. “You’re the one who said you wanted to talk to me about this.” Sapnap reminded him, making Dream finally look at him.

“Yes, *months*.” Dream sighed, rubbing his temples. “But that doesn’t mean anything-”

“It means something.” Sapnap interrupted. He was almost taken aback by the way Dream seemed to be assured by him disagreeing. “So what’s the deal then? Why are you so quick to negate what’s going on between you guys?” Sapnap asked.

“I don’t know.” Dream muttered, going back to his bad habit of not looking at Sapnap. “I guess, if I say we’re nothing *first*, then it won’t hurt as much when *he* says it means nothing.” Dream explained, his eyes fixed on the hallway to his room.

“Has George ever said it meant nothing?” Sapnap made his way back over to Dream, jumping up to sit on the counter beside him.

“Well, *no*, but he’s never disagreed with me when I said it.” Dream justified, turning to face Sapnap now that he was by his side.

“If from the *very* beginning George said what you guys have means nothing, would *you* challenge it?” Sapnap asked. He rolled his eyes when Dream stared blankly at him, not answering the question. “I’m saying if you were so quick to label it as meaningless from the start, he probably thinks that’s what *you* want.”

“But I don’t want that.” Dream furrowed his brow.

“Okay, *I* know that and *you* know that. But you know who doesn’t know that?” Sapnap asked, nodding his head towards Dream’s room.

“No, he knows. I mean, I’ve never *told* him, but-”

“For fuck’s sake- and you wondered why I didn’t believe you just had ‘*good intuition*’.” Sapnap interrupted. “Listen, you can’t just expect people to know what’s going on in your head. I’m not asking you to confirm that what I’m saying is true, I just want you to think about it. I’m guessing you’re the first *guy* George has been with. You, on the other hand, *have* been with guys before, which we all know about. If George sees you as the experienced one here, he’s going to follow your lead.” He explained, lowering his voice a bit.

“George isn’t naïve.” Dream argued.

“That doesn’t make him naïve, it just means he trusts you.” Sapnap countered, watching the look of realization set in on Dream’s face.

“You’re saying I’ve been cockblocking myself this whole time?” Dream asked. It was a genuine question, really, but hearing the word ‘*cockblock*’ be used so seriously was funny to Sapnap’s immature mind.

“Yeah, pretty much.” Sapnap laughed, doing his best to block the hits Dream was throwing at him. “Just tell him you take it back, that you don’t want it to mean nothing anymore.” Sapnap suggested, pushing away Dream’s hands.

“You say that like it’s the easiest thing in the world.” Dream muttered, returning to his position of being leaned against the counter.

“Think about it this way, you said George isn’t naïve. You also said this has been going on for a few months. Do you *really* think George is going to believe that it still means nothing after, what, three months?” Sapnap asked.

“Seven.” Dream corrected, his voice nearly a whisper.

“Don’t tell me you mean *seven months*.” Sapnap asked through a scoff, hitting Dream in the arm. The embarrassed look on Dream’s face was enough for Sapnap to know he indeed *did* mean seven months.

“Jesus- okay, *you’re* the naïve one if you think George sees your relationship as nothing if it’s been going on for over half a year.” Sapnap shook his head, jumping down from the counter.

“But-”

“Go tell George how you feel, you idiot.” Sapnap said over his shoulder, walking back towards his room. He heard heavy footsteps approaching but didn’t have time to turn around before two arms wrapped around his shoulders. “Alright, alright-”

“Thanks, man. For the advice, for not freaking out, for everything.” Dream interrupted, resting his chin on the top of Sapnap’s head.

“Least I could do.” Sapnap answered, his voice sounding rather genuine. “And, uh, *hey*- you better keep that shit in *your* room. Mine and George’s bedrooms literally share a wall.” Sapnap said more light heartedly, elbowing Dream as best as he could.

“You’re such an idiot.” Dream laughed, letting go and pushing Sapnap forward.

Sapnap laughed, looking over his shoulder in time to see Dream jogging towards his room. As much as it felt like some cosmic joke that this was how they all ended up, it warmed Sapnap’s heart nonetheless.

Knowing that there were four best friends, two *couples*, all sharing one roof- it felt unreal. There was a grin plastered across Sapnap’s face for his entire walk back to his room. He felt light, floaty even, seeing just how well everything seemed to work out.

“You’re back.” Karl said with a smile, looking up from his phone, laying in the middle of Sapnap’s bed.

“So-” Sapnap started, climbing into his bed as well. Karl set down his phone and opened his arms, letting Sapnap sprawl out over him. “Apparently Dream has known I’m gay basically since *I* knew.” Sapnap laughed, pushing his face into Karl’s chest once Karl began running his fingers through his hair.

“Wow, I mean, I guess that took off the pressure of telling him?” Karl laughed, his hands slowing down in Sapnap’s hair. “What was his reaction to hearing about us? Did he figure that one out on his own as well?” Karl’s voice was the same light tone.

Sapnap pulled himself up so he and Karl were face to face, green eyes meeting his favorite color of blue.

“I didn’t tell him- I thought we *weren’t* telling him?” Sapnap asked, watching the smile on Karl’s face fade.

“I mean, we said that before we knew they’re totally ‘*not*’ together.” Karl answered, rolling his eyes as he said the word ‘not’.

“I don’t get it.” Sapnap said slowly, pulling himself off of Karl. “You’re okay with people knowing now?” He asked, sitting up in front of him.

“I, uh, I don’t know about *that*.” Karl answered a bit nervously, sitting up in bed as well. “But Dream, well, Dream *and* George knowing feels different now. Doesn’t it? I don’t know, it almost feels like we have some kind of mutual understanding now or something.” Karl shrugged.

“You’re saying...” Sapnap squinted, hoping Karl could clarify a bit more. He was starting to realize how Dream must’ve felt earlier when they were talking, seeing that he couldn’t seem to follow Karl’s explanation.

“I’m *saying* telling them doesn’t feel like the ‘start of telling everyone’ like I originally thought it would. I’m assuming they want their relationship to be private for the time being, which is also what we want. I don’t know, I just feel better about telling them knowing they’re in the same spot as we are.” Karl shrugged, his smile returning.

“Well, not the *same* spot.” Sapnap said with a mischievous smile.

“What does that mean?” Karl asked skeptically, glancing down at Sapnap’s less than friendly smile.

“Not that it’s a *competition*-”

“Oh god.”

“*But!*” Sapnap laughed at Karl’s interjection. “But- I think we’ve made more progress in seven days than they have in seven *months*.” He laughed, watching Karl’s reaction to ‘months’.

“That long? Wait, did you get any details?” Karl asked in disbelief. Sapnap laid back down on the bed next to Karl, tugging on Karl’s arm so he would lay on his chest this time.

“How about this- we tell them about us tonight and then you can hear first hand just how dysfunctional those idiots are.” Sapnap pitched, leaning forward to kiss Karl lightly before he laid his head on Sapnap’s chest.

“We’re really doing this, huh?” Karl asked under his breath.

“Take today to think about it. There’s no rush, $\phi\omega\varsigma\ \mu\omicron\upsilon\upsilon$.” Sapnap answered, running his hands slowly up and down Karl’s back.

“*Foz moo*? What’s that?” Karl asked, trying to repeat the phrase.

“It means ‘my light’.” Sapnap answered, closing his eyes, already feeling like he could fall back asleep.

“Like a lightbulb?” Karl asked, which pulled a laugh out of Sapnap.

“No, not like a *lightbulb*, you moron.” He said, holding Karl to his chest more tightly when he tried to squirm away. “*My light*, like, you’re the light of my life, you’re my sun and my stars.” He explained through a mumble, relaxing his grip when Karl laid still on his chest again.

“Your sun and your stars.” Karl repeated under his breath. Sapnap was only able to muster up a hum in response, finding himself drifting off to sleep, while Karl drew shapes on his chest.

This is the second to last chapter, so next week will be the story finale :) thanks so much for sticking around and persevering through the angst <3 love you all sm

Because you are love

Chapter Summary

Sapnap and Karl talk about what happens once Karl goes back to North Carolina

Chapter Notes

The final chapter :')

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sapnap found himself in a position he wasn't often in- he had woken up from their nap before Karl.

Although he prided himself on the way Karl seemed to always fall asleep around and/or *on* him, he'd be kidding himself if he said Karl didn't have the same effect on him. Most times when Karl would take an impromptu nap, Sapnap would also fall asleep.

Typically, Sapnap would be the last to wake up. He would inevitably wake up to the sound of a video playing on Karl's phone, or even sometimes Karl giggling under his breath, while trying to take photos of Sapnap sleeping.

Today was different, though. When Sapnap found himself blinking his eyes open in slow waves, the only sound in the room was Karl's deep breathing. He had slid away from Sapnap's chest at some point during their mid morning nap, leaving Sapnap alone on his usual side of the bed.

As much as Sapnap wanted to pull Karl back over to him, he knew it would wake him up, and he wanted to make sure Karl got as much sleep as he could. So instead, Sapnap snuck out of the bed, trying his best to not make too much noise. It wasn't until Sapnap was finished tidying up the mess Karl insisted he leave behind that he looked over to check on Karl.

Karl was still sleeping soundly, not having moved an inch since Sapnap left the bed. He made his way over to the bed, ready to climb back in, when his phone vibrating on his nightstand caught his attention.

Dream (11:49am): are you awake yet

Sapnap shook his head silently, setting his phone down again. No sense in telling Dream he's awake if he plans on going right back to-

Dream (11:50am): theres something i wanted to talk about w you

With his interests now peaked, Sapnap decided against crawling back into bed. He tiptoed his way to his bedroom door, closing it slowly to avoid waking Karl.

I'm up. I'll meet you in your room.

Sapnap texted Dream back while already heading in that direction. Dream's room was on the

opposite side of the house, which was something he was growing increasingly thankful for. As soon as Sapnap looked up from his phone, he was already face to face with Dream, who seemed to be on his way to Sapnap's room.

"Oh, I was just-"

"-heading to your room." Dream started and Sapnap finished his thought. Sapnap looked to Dream's side, waiting to see the shadow of George appear from behind him.

"George fell back asleep. That's, uh, that's why I was hoping to talk to you now." Dream shrugged, letting out an uncomfortable laugh. Sapnap felt a bit uneasy, seeing that Dream was giving him uncertain vibes. But, as far as he had noticed, George wasn't sleeping in his own room, which meant he had to be in Dream's. Their conversation couldn't have gone too poorly if George chose to stay in Dream's room, right?

"So, what's up?" Sapnap asked, crossing his arms and heading towards the living room, seeing that it was clear neither of their bedrooms were options at the moment. Dream followed behind, scooping Patches off her cat bed once they entered the room.

"George and I." Dream stated. It sounded like it was just the tip of the iceberg, but he didn't continue after starting the conversation.

"You guys talked?" Sapnap asked, sitting down on the couch. The smell of French toast and coffee still clung to the air. It made Sapnap simultaneously hungry and stressed, considering it acted as another reminder of their *interesting* morning.

"Yes and no." Dream answered, sitting on the opposite side of the couch from Sapnap. Patches, who had been vocalizing her displeasure from being woken up, was now fully relaxed against Dream's chest.

"Look, I'm not going to make you explain if you don't want to, but your text said you wanted to talk. *So*, you guys talked?" Sapnap repeated, adjusting in his seat so he and Dream were facing each other.

"I told him that you and I talked." Dream started. "He asked how you took it and I said you were fine. Then he, well, I don't know- he moved on like nothing happened. It felt like having a conversation about what '*together*' means didn't even cross his mind." Dream sighed, leaning back against the arm of the couch.

"Wait, what do you mean a conversation about, *what*?" Sapnap questioned, his gaze narrowing in on Dream.

"A conversation about what *exactly* George means when he casually says we're together, like, that could mean a million things." Dream explained, letting out another sigh.

"What was the context of George saying you two are *together*?" Sapnap asked. Dream was right; *together* could mean a lot of things.

"Just now, when he asked how you took it- well, he didn't say 'it'. Specifically, he asked, '*so, how did Sapnap react to the news that we're together?*'" Dream answered, clearly trying to impersonate George's accent and failing miserably.

"George said you're together." Sapnap said, his statement sounding more like a question.

"Well, *technically*. But that's what I mean- what does *together* mean in this-"

“You’re such an idiot, Jesus fucking Christ.” Sapnap interrupted, muttering under his breath. “George was asking you how I took the news that you two are *together*- meaning how did I react to finding out my best friends are in a relationship.” Sapnap explained.

“Okay, but you don’t *know* that.” Dream countered. He had begun to nervously move around enough that Patches became annoyed, jumping off his chest, and making her way back to the cat bed.

“Dude, just think about it. George is the *laziest* person I have ever met- both physically and emotionally. When has George ever gone out of his way to play mind games or be intentionally confusing when it came to dating? Has he been an idiot before? Yeah, we all have. But if George is referring to you two as *together*, it’s because he believes you guys *are* together- not because he’s playing mind games with you.” Sapnap continued to explain, lowering his voice to ensure he wouldn’t wake anyone.

“George didn’t want to talk about whether or not we’re dating... because he already assumes we are?” Dream asked. “But, no- no way! We’ve never had that kind of conversation before!” Dream shook his head, clearly not grasping the point Sapnap was trying to make, nor bothering to also lower his voice.

“Yeah, after seven *months*, you stop wondering about that sort of thing and just take it at face value. Think of it like those states where if you live with someone for long enough, the state views you as married. It doesn’t matter if you ever actually planned on getting married because now the government basically decided you’re, like, *honorarily* married.” Sapnap rolled his eyes.

“Wait, are you saying George thinks we have a common law marriage?” Dream asked, which caused Sapnap to let out a low groan. He swore that his 16-year-old brother was more competent than Dream at this point.

“No, you idiot. I’m saying after *that* long, you stop questioning things. You said it yourself that you two never had a talk about being exclusive, but you also know neither of you are seeing anyone else. Things don’t always need an explicit conversation to fall into place. Look, if you want to test it, refer to him as your boyfriend randomly. When you order something for dinner tonight, say, ‘*for me, a pepperoni pizza with olives, and for my boyfriend, a margarita pizza.*’ Once you order, look at him and if he looks distraught, hell, maybe I’m wrong and you guys aren’t on the same page. *But*, what I think is more likely is that he’ll just tell you to make sure to ask for no tomatoes on his pizza- he’ll be totally nonchalant about being called your boyfriend.” Sapnap shrugged.

“Just, call him my boyfriend? But not *to* him, just *around* him?” Dream clarified, finally seeming to get on the same page.

“Seems a whole lot easier than having some weird ‘what are we’ conversation seven months into things.” Sapnap responded with a laugh.

“Is that what you did with Karl? Did you just start calling him your boyfriend one day and-”

“*What?*” Sapnap interrupted, the smile instantly falling from his face.

“You and... Karl?” Dream answered slowly, appearing to be taken aback by Sapnap’s sudden distress. “You guys have always been *close* but never, like, lovey-dovey pet names *close*. I figured you two were dating now- sorry, am I way off or something?” Dream cut himself off, squinting at Sapnap.

“What pet name? I didn’t call-”

“You called him baby- well, μωρό μου, but same thing.” Dream shrugged. Sapnap could only stare blankly at Dream, completely dumbfounded he was able to figure that out.

“How- but when did you, wait-” Sapnap tried to speak, but the words became twisted on his tongue, due to his nerves getting the better of him. “You know *Greek*?” Sapnap finally got out. It wasn’t quite the question he wanted to ask, but it got the point across nonetheless.

“I don’t- not, like, *fluently* at least. But come on, you of all people know how much I love Percy Jackson and Greek mythology. I can recognize *some* stuff when I hear or read it.” Dream shrugged.

“I had no idea- I mean, I knew about you *liking* that stuff, but not that you actually learned some of the language.” Sapnap said, leaning back into his seat.

“But anyway, don’t get me wrong, I know I’m pretty much a helpless idiot when it comes to *my* love life, but I’m usually pretty good about reading what’s going on in other people’s. Even so, tell me if I’m wrong about you and Karl and I’ll drop it.” Dream waved his hand, getting them back on track.

“Yeah, uh, we’re in a relationship.” Sapnap said slowly. It wasn’t how he wanted this to happen, but no matter what, he was backed into a corner. Saying ‘no’ meant lying to Dream’s face, but saying the answer to Dream’s question was something he couldn’t give him right now was practically a dead give away anyway.

“Well, you’ve liked him since *forever*, so that’s good news.” Dream tried to sound optimistic, despite Sapnap’s noticeable anxiety.

“Jesus- *fuck*, have I ever kept a secret from you? Do you hack into my brain while I sleep and download everything?” Sapnap asked sarcastically, making Dream laugh.

“Even crazier than that- you’re just my best friend and I notice things about you.” Dream leaned back in his seat, seeming to relax fully again. “You’re also not the most *subtle* when you have a crush. There’s a reason the fans have so much ‘karlnap’ content- you’re practically spoon feeding it to them.” Dream retorted, letting out another laugh when Sapnap threw a pillow at him.

“Whatever. So, *you* know. Does George know? Does anyone *else* know?” Sapnap asked once Dream settled back into his seat.

“Just me. Well, George suspects *something*, but I wouldn’t say he’s come to any definite conclusions. But, I mean, you guys showed up in the middle of the night, you talked about leaving Texas *together*, plus you were *extra* close this morning- you can’t blame him for thinking something is up.” Dream shrugged.

“I guess that’s fair.” Sapnap said quietly, piecing together how suspicious their surprise appearance must’ve seemed.

“Look, I thought because you called him baby in front of me, it meant you two were *out*- so to speak. If that’s not the case, I can pretend like I don’t know anything when Karl’s around and I’ll act dumb if George asks me anything.” Dream offered with a smile.

“I hate to take you up on it, but yeah, that would be great. So much of our relationship has felt out of our control. Like, no matter how hard we try, things keep going wrong. I just want to give him this *one* thing, to feel like it’s his choice, you know?” Sapnap sighed, rubbing his face in his hand.

“I never meant to take away his choice- *both* of your choices when it came to telling me.” Dream said almost remorsefully.

“I know, don’t worry about it. Really, it’s on me for being an idiot.” Sapnap chuckled under his breath, lifting his head out of his hand.

“So, do I get details?” Dream asked with a growing smile and wiggling eyebrows. Sapnap let out a laugh, pushing himself up to stand.

“Not today, lover boy.” Sapnap answered, ruffling up Dream’s hair when he walked by.

“Nick?” Dream called out, catching Sapnap’s attention just as he was about to head up the stairs. He took a few steps back, peeking his head around the corner.

“I’m really happy for you. You two are made for each other.” Dream said with a smile, also standing from the couch.

What Dream had to say was simple, nothing profound or life changing. But in that moment, those simple words unlocked the piece of Sapnap’s heart that yearned to feel supported, validated, *accepted*.

“Love you, brother.” Sapnap said with a smile, looking away before Dream could see that he was getting choked up.

“Love you, brother.” Dream repeated back, already sounding a bit further away, like he was heading towards his own room. Sapnap was always thankful for Dream’s easygoingness, how he never pushed him *too* much.

After taking a few breaths, Sapnap made his way back to his room, opening the door as quietly as he could.

“Oh, you’re awake?” Sapnap asked, his eyes locking with Karl’s as soon as he entered the room. Karl had a blanket pulled up to his face, rubbing the fabric lightly against his lips. Instead of answering, Karl shook his head, before burying his face into the pillow.

“Pretty sure answering my question means you’re awake, *μωρό μου* (Greek to English translation: my baby).” Sapnap laughed quietly, making his way across the room to Karl’s side of the bed.

When his hands traced over Karl’s back, encouraging him to face him, Karl let out a series of groans. Sapnap leaned down so he could kiss the side of Karl’s head before standing up straight again.

“*No*.” Karl mumbled from his place in the bed, a heavy sense of exhaustion present in the minimal effort he put into reaching out for Sapnap.

“I’m just going to my side of the bed.” Sapnap laughed, making his way around the bed, emptying his pockets onto his nightstand. When he looked back up at Karl, his smile slipped away, as he saw Karl staring at his phone. The crestfallen expression on Karl’s face only grew when their eyes met.

“I’m sorry, it’s-”

“No.” Sapnap interrupted, crawling into bed and making his way to Karl’s side. “Don’t say it’s Jimmy, or Sean, or anything that means you have to go back early.” Sapnap felt like he was begging, *pleading*, at this point.

“Well, it’s not really *early*. When I left on Thursday, I told Jimmy I’d only be gone for a week and, well, now it’s Wednesday afternoon.” Karl said regretfully, holding his arms out for Sapnap.

There was no hesitation in the way Sapnap fell onto Karl’s chest, wrapping his arms around Karl’s waist. They hugged each other tightly at first, but soon relaxed, settling into the sullen mood, which filled the air.

Leaving Karl had always been hard for Sapnap and that was *before* everything that had happened. Before he knew what it was like to kiss Karl, to be honest with the way he said he loved him, to be able to look Karl in the eyes as he said it back to him- all of it.

How was he meant to go from having that all day everyday back to distance? Back to having one scheduled phone call a day? Back to not hearing from Karl for hours- sometimes *days* on end, while he’s off filming something for Mr. Beast? Back to only seeing Karl once every month or so?

“What are you thinking about?” Karl asked, being the first to break the tense silence.

“Nothing, just, taking in this moment.” Sapnap half-lied. He didn’t want to burden Karl with his insecurities. Plus, he really was doing his best to appreciate the moment for what it was- their first goodbye as boyfriends.

“I think... I think I’m mad.” Karl said slowly, which pulled Sapnap out of whatever bittersweet train of thought he was trapped in.

“Why?” He asked, leaning away enough to look at Karl. There was a flush to his face and his eyes were at the beginning stages of becoming bloodshot.

“Because this *sucks*.” Karl said with an almost scoff, looking away, and wiping his eyes as an attempt to prevent any tears from forming.

“μωρό μου (Greek to English translation: my baby).” Sapnap mumbled, gently pulling Karl’s hand away from his face. He didn’t want to tell Karl ‘*don’t be mad*’ or anything else that could be interpreted as dismissive.

“I mean, we’re together- we’re *finally* together.” Karl started, looking away from Sapnap again the second his eyes started to water more profusely. “And now that just- goes away? *I go away?*” Karl asked, closing his eyes when the first tear escaped, rolling over the bridge of his nose, and landing on Sapnap’s pillow.

Hearing that Karl was feeling the same frustration and insecurity as him wasn’t as comforting as Sapnap hoped it would be. All it did was remind him that they had no alternative- he had no way to *fix* it.

“*This* doesn’t go away. Not because of distance. Not because of work. There isn’t a single thing in the world that can make this *right here* go away.” Sapnap did his best to assure him. He extended his pointer finger, tapping Karl’s chest over his heart, then doing the same to himself.

“You’re forgetting the part where I said I’m *mad*.” Karl answered. “I’m *mad* I have to go. I’m *mad* we don’t have more time to figure everything out. I’m *mad* that the person I’m in love with lives ten hours away from me.” Karl answered, his voice becoming more strained with each passing sentence.

“You can be mad. You have all the right to be mad.” Sapnap sighed, reaching out to hold onto the tightly clenched fists Karl had pushing against his chest.

“I feel like an *idiot*- waiting around all this time for something- *someone* who was always right in front of me. You were there, *loving me*, and I didn’t even realize. I mean- I could’ve had *this* a year ago! Before I bought my house, before I signed my contract with Jimmy, before I made so many decisions on my own. If I had just opened my eyes sooner, we wouldn’t be saying goodbye right now.” The quiver in Karl’s voice grew as he repeated the same motion Sapnap had done, tapping his finger on each of their hearts.

Sapnap pulled Karl’s face to his chest, hushing the cries that Karl could no longer fight back.

“Σε αγαπώ (Greek to English translation: I love you).” Sapnap mumbled repeatedly, stroking his hand through the tresses of Karl’s hair.

There was an unmistakable pain growing in the back of Sapnap’s throat, an all too familiar feeling that accompanied suppressing his own tears. As much as he wanted Karl to see that there was nothing to be upset over, he too was feeling a sense of misplaced anger about the situation.

“This isn’t how things are supposed to be.” Karl cried, pressing his face into the crook of Sapnap’s neck.

“But it’s how things are.” Sapnap answered quietly, kissing the side of Karl’s head. He knew his words wouldn’t bring comfort, but he didn’t really have much else to offer.

Silence fell over them again and Karl’s cries slowed to something more quiet. With a final sniffle, he pulled away from Sapnap’s chest, keeping his face down.

Sapnap moved his hand from the back of Karl’s head to his chin, lifting Karl’s face. He wiped the remaining tears that clung to Karl’s cheeks with the cuff of his sleeve.

“How am I supposed to go back to being alone?” Karl asked, tilting his face into Sapnap’s hand before he could pull it away.

“You’re hardly alone.” Sapnap did his best to muster up a smile. It was true- between his brother, their friends, and filming for Mr. Beast, Karl was always on the road or had someone staying at his house with him.

“You know what I meant. Alone means without *you*.” Karl answered, closing his eyes. Sapnap watched Karl’s face relax, admiring the tinge of redness that stubbornly remained around his cheeks and nose.

“You know I’m going to be there as often as I can.” Sapnap’s smile faded when he noticed the way Karl’s brows seemed to tense and relax over and over again.

“George is here now.” Karl said slowly, his words sounding a bit detached.

“Yeah, so?” Sapnap questioned. He already missed the peaceful look that had finally returned to Karl’s face. The new anxiety settling in had begun to distort and tense Karl’s features.

“So, that means now it’s time for all the dream team content. The announcement, the streams, the *vlogs*-” Karl started listing off, pulling away from Sapnap’s embrace so he could sit up. “You’re going to be swamped with work- you won’t be able to visit for weeks, maybe *months*.” Karl said with a panicked urgency to his voice.

“Hey, hey, hey- relax, αγάπη μου (Greek to English translation: my love).” Sapnap hushed, sitting up to follow Karl. “George is here, which is *awesome*, but it doesn’t mean we’re all going to be handcuffed together or something. Plus, I’m sure they’re going to want time to themselves anyway.

I don't care if it's just for a couple days at a time and I spend the whole time watching you edit or be on set, I'm going to fly up as often as you'll let me." Sapnap assured him, reaching out to hold Karl's face in his hands.

"You'll burn yourself out if you travel that much." Karl warned with a saddened tone, like he wished he felt more comfort in Sapnap's proposition.

"Then you better give me lots of back rubs and tell me how pretty you think I am- I've heard that's the only way to fight burnout." Sapnap tried to sound serious, but a smile quickly grew on his face. It was obvious that Karl was fighting back a smile himself.

"Be serious." Karl said with a weary expression.

"I couldn't be more serious. Promise." Sapnap leaned forward, kissing Karl's cheek. As soon as he tried to pull away, Karl grabbed onto his hoodie.

"I don't have to leave until tomorrow morning. What if today we just..." Karl trailed off, letting go of Sapnap's hoodie and slowly tracing his hands up Sapnap's neck, stopping when he reached his cheeks.

"Tell me what you want. Whatever it is, it's yours." Sapnap said quietly, leaning in, but stopping just short of Karl's lips.

"I want you to kiss me." Karl answered without any hesitation, his voice matching Sapnap's in volume.

"I can do that." Sapnap said with a smile, leaning in to kiss Karl. The kiss was slow and deep, the kind of kiss that acted as a preemptive *'I miss you'*. As much as Sapnap tried to maintain a smile throughout the kiss, he couldn't help but focus on how sad it all felt. How nothing was going to change the fact Karl would be leaving in the morning.

"What else do you want?" Sapnap asked, breaking the kiss. He pecked Karl's lips a few times before moving to his cheeks, showering every inch of Karl's skin with kisses.

"I want this." Karl answered, moving closer to Sapnap, and resting his head on Sapnap's shoulder.

"This?" Sapnap asked, a tinge of amusement in his voice.

"Just this." Karl confirmed, adjusting his arms around Sapnap's shoulders.

Sapnap held Karl tightly around his waist, pulling him onto his chest as he laid back down in bed. Karl appeared to be unbothered by the change of position. If anything, he was already making himself more comfortable.

"You know what I was thinking about earlier?" Sapnap asked, while slowly dragging his hand up and down the full length of Karl's spine. Karl had started to trace his fingers over Sapnap's chest, no particular words or drawings that Sapnap could identify this time.

"Hmm?" Karl asked, turning his face to the side so he could see Sapnap.

"I was thinking about the conversation we had our first night sleeping together in Texas. Right before I fell asleep, you asked me what I was thinking about, and I said how much I love you." Sapnap paused, tilting his chin down, allowing him to see Karl's face.

"Yeah, then you said something like, *'but it's not what you think'*." Karl laughed after doing an

ominous impression of Sapnap.

“I didn’t say it like *that*.” Sapnap disagreed, squeezing Karl when his laughter continued. “*Anyway*, I was just thinking about how, I don’t know, how much happier I am now that I don’t have to hide behind cryptic wording and half-truths. I feel lighter- I feel... *free*.” Sapnap continued, no longer squeezing Karl, but instead holding him gently once again.

“You know what *I* was actually thinking about earlier?” Karl asked after a second, leaning forward to rest his forehead against Sapnap’s neck.

“And what’s that, λουλούδι μου (Greek to English translation: my flower)?” Sapnap asked, lulling his head to the side to rest his cheek on the top of Karl’s head.

“I was thinking about how, *objectively*, this has been one of the most hectic, scattered, and just *busy* weeks of my life, but I’ve felt... slow- in a good way.” Karl clarified at the end, nuzzling his face a bit closer.

“What does ‘slow’ feel like?” Sapnap asked, closing his eyes when Karl reached his hand up and began twirling a few of his mostly-dry curls.

“Like, even though we were constantly running around, I never felt *rushed*. Every time I’m with you- when I’m in your arms, it feels like time slows down. Being with you feels like stopping to smell the roses.” Karl explained, his lips grazing against the skin of Sapnap’s neck with each word.

Sapnap’s heart was racing and he was almost certain that Karl could feel it too. His cheeks were burning up, undoubtedly crimson in color.

All Sapnap wanted, more than just making Karl happy, was to make Karl feel at peace. Hearing Karl, completely out of the blue, compare Sapnap to one of the most quiet, peaceful, simple pleasures in life- it made Sapnap feel like he was doing something right.

He leaned back, noticeably taking Karl off guard. That didn’t stop Sapnap from leaning down, bringing his lips to Karl’s. Although the kiss had a hasty start, it immediately slowed, as did the hand Sapnap had trailing across Karl’s back.

“What was that for?” Karl asked quietly once Sapnap broke the kiss, their faces still only a few inches apart.

“Because I love you, φως μου (Greek to English translation: my light).” Sapnap answered, the smile on his face unfaltering.

“And I love you, φεγγάρι μου.” Karl replied, his own smile growing.

It took Sapnap a second to process what Karl had said, convinced that his ears were playing a trick on him. A nervous but light giggle passed through Karl’s lips before he covered his mouth with his hand.

“Say it again.” Sapnap insisted, reaching forward to pull Karl’s hand away from his face.

“I *said*, I love you, φεγγάρι μου.” Karl answered, unable to hold back his smile, no matter how serious he wanted to be.

“φεγγάρι μου.” Sapnap repeated, his smile returning, somehow wider than before.

“My moon.” Karl translated, his eyes eagerly flicking between Sapnap’s. “I don’t know why I

didn't think of it sooner- I've called you my moon a few times before. Last night, you said I was your light-"

"My sun and my stars." Sapnap finished his sentence, finding it increasingly difficult to hold himself back from kissing Karl.

"If I'm the sun, you're the moon. You're φεγγάρι μου (Greek to English translation: *my moon*)."

Karl finished, his eyes dragging down to Sapnap's lips.

"It's perfect." Sapnap whispered. The hand he had anchored to the back of Karl's neck had begun pulling Karl in closer, regardless of whether or not it was a conscious effort anymore.

"I told you I'd figure it out." Karl taunted, closing the distance between them before Sapnap could argue.

Sapnap laughed into the kiss, which in turn made Karl begin to laugh as well. Even so, it didn't stop their lips from desperately trying to remain connected.

Somehow, something as simple as wasting away the day in bed, talking about everything and nothing at the same time, had been exactly what Sapnap's heart had been craving.

To hold and be held by Karl, to trace the outline of constellations he found in the freckles that scattered over the bridge of Karl's nose, to listen to the beautiful symphony of Karl's laughter. Every minute they spent together felt like an hour, as though Karl were right when he said time seemed to slow down for them, prolonging the time they spent in each other's arms.

Even as the sun dipped lower and lower in the sky, threatening to touch the horizon at any moment, Sapnap would never regret spending his entire day in bed with Karl. From eating take out and watching anime, to laughing under the covers between stolen kisses, Sapnap knew in his heart this was one of the best days of his life.

It was simple, yes, but the feelings between them were more complex than either of them could describe. Two best friends, who crashed into each other's lives through a series of random events, had somehow ended up here- in bed, in the other's embrace, in *love*.

From the moment Sapnap's eyes saw Karl through a screen for the very first time, he knew that the beautiful boy before him was going to be a very important person in his life.

And he was right.

Chapter End Notes

The end..... <3

jglaskfdsla cue sappy author note:

okay, this book may be my favorite i've written. it challenged me, it made ME cry (i don't think i've ever cried while writing before), it gave me something to look forward to. and now it's over.

bittersweet doesn't even begin to describe how i feel. if i could, i would continue with this book for a lifetime, writing in painstakingly domestic-fluffy detail about karlnap

moving in together and picking out paint colors for their bedroom, with their two cats (they only planned on getting one but the cats were cuddling so separating them would've been a crime, obviously) sleeping in their unmade bed. but alas, fanfictions must come to an end.

okay, i've ranted enough. i love you so much, thank you for reading, commenting, voting, everything. you guys are genuinely so cool and the friendships i've made through writing are ones i'll cherish for years to come.

i hope i see you again, wherever that may be- something old, something new.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!